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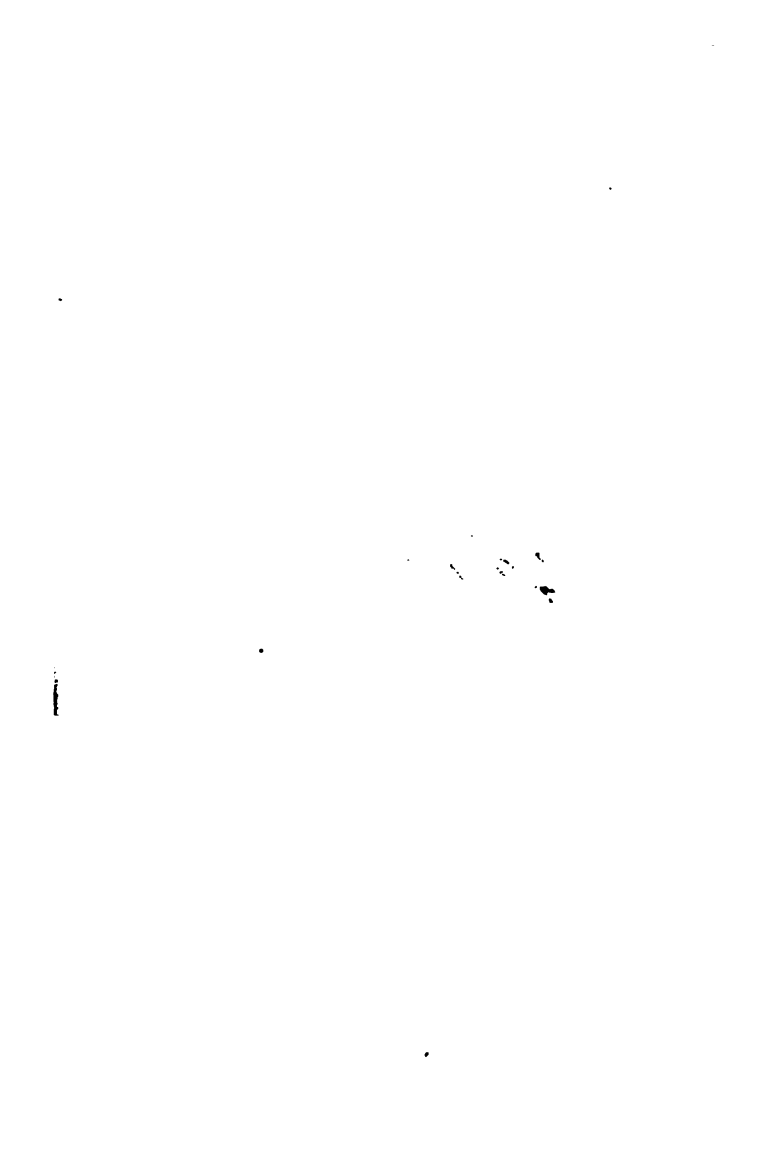
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CONVERSATIONS
ON
THE PARABLES

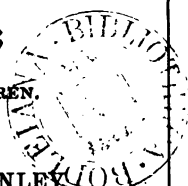
OF THE

New Testament ;

FOR THE USE OF CHILDREN.

BY

EDWARD, LORD STANLEY.



“And with many such parables spake He the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.

“But without a parable spake He not unto them : and when they were alone, He expounded all things to His disciples.”

MARK iv. 33, 34.

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PREFACE DEDICATORY.

TO MRS. ———.

MY DEAR ———,

IN dedicating my little work to you, I feel that I secure one *indulgent*, and (you tell me I may add) one *approving* Reader. I am aware of the difficulty of the task which I have undertaken: I am conscious how impossible it is to unfold the full beauties and the hidden meanings of the Parables of the New Testament; and how doubly hopeless is the task, to bring those beauties and those meanings into language suited for the comprehension of children. It is, there-

fore, probable, that in many instances, while in my endeavour to simplify I have failed in doing justice to my subject, I have, at the same time, fallen into the opposite fault, of being above the understanding of my youthful readers. To mothers like yourself I must trust to supply my deficiencies in these respects: but I could not resist the temptation of entering upon a field which seemed to me, strange as it may appear, hitherto untrodden—of explaining, in a familiar way, these most attractive portions of the Sacred Writings; and for this purpose, the form of conversation, which I have adopted, struck me as the most convenient. It enables the writer to propound and explain such difficulties as he supposes most likely to strike the mind of his young readers: and it gives him the opportunity of relieving, by occasional breaks, the tedium, to a child, of a regular and continued lecture.

From the commencement of my project, you have uniformly encouraged me to proceed: to

you I owe it that my task is at length completed : you have given me the highest sanction in your power, by assuring me that my little work is one which you would place, with a hope of its being useful, in the hands of your own children ; and those who know you can alone appreciate the value of this assurance. Imperfect as I feel it to be, to you I present it : my hopes will have been more than realized, should other parents find in it the means of leading their children to study with pleasure that Holy Book, which, “known from a child,” will make us wise unto salvation ;” and which, “diligently searched,” and piously meditated upon, will “surely bring a man peace at the last.”

Believe me,

My Dear ——,

Yours,

With sincere respect, esteem,
and friendship,

THE AUTHOR.

KNOWSLEY,
May, 1828.



CONVERSATIONS

ON THE

PARABLES OF THE NEW TESTAMENTS.

“MAMMA,” said Henry B—, a lively intelligent child of seven years old, “I have finished that pretty Book of Bible Stories, which Papa gave me on my last birth-day; but when do you think I shall be old enough to read the real, real Bible, like you and Papa?”

Mrs. B. My dear, the stories in your book are taken from what you call the real Bible, and only put into a form supposed to be more suited to your comprehension. You know Mary is two years older than you, and

it is only lately that she has been allowed to read by herself that sacred book, the written word of God. In it, indeed, though as His word it is the fountain of all wisdom, and intended for all persons, there is much which is not only above your understanding, but above mine or your father's.

Henry. Oh, Mamma! above *your* understanding, or Papa's? you are joking now.

Mrs. B. Indeed, my love, I am not; and when you are old enough to read and to study the Bible, as it should be read and studied, you will discover, at every new reading, as the best and wisest men have done, some new excellence, something which you had not noticed before, and which properly considered, may make you better, and wiser, and happier.

Henry. Oh! Mamma, *how* I *should* like to be able to begin reading it now! But do not you think that, if I may not read it to myself, you could pick out little bits, and read them to us. We would both be very attentive, and always ask you anything that we did not understand. Could not you, Mamma?

Mrs. B. Yes, my dear, I think I can ; for God designed His word to be taught to the poor and the ignorant, as well as to the rich and the wise ; and though you cannot understand the *full* meaning even of those parts which I shall read to you, you may, even at your age, derive much instruction from them : for Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has condescended to give lessons and rules of conduct even for little children like you and Mary. Some of these, which I mean to begin reading to you, are contained in what are called *parables* : Mary has already read some of them, but I think she will find in them a good deal that she has not yet observed or understood.

“ Mamma,” said Mary, “ I should like to begin by asking what are parables *exactly* ? ”

Mrs. B. I am very glad, my dear Mary, to find that you wish to know the meaning of everything *exactly*. Keep up this habit, my dear little girl, and never be satisfied with *half* understanding anything for want of taking pains to understand it *wholly*. The word *parable* means, literally, a *comparison*,

and is applied in Scripture to short stories, which were frequently used by the prophets in the Old Testament, and by our Saviour in the New, to impress upon the minds of their hearers some moral lesson. They used outward and visible objects to represent by comparison such as are heavenly and invisible: they described religion, the soul and all that belongs to it, under the figure of things on the earth and belonging to the body: they related imaginary occurrences, and then compared them with the real circumstances before them; or sometimes left the hearers to draw their own comparisons, when the story was told. Do you remember a story that I told you a few days ago, about a little girl and her nurse?

“Oh! yes, Mamma,” said Mary, blushing; “and I remember very well that I thought the little girl very naughty, and then you surprised me by shewing me that I had been just as naughty myself. But was that a parable, Mamma?”

Mrs. B. It partook of the nature of a parable, my love, and I was pleased to see

how readily you made the comparison for yourself, and acknowledged your own fault, after condemning the *imaginary* little girl. But what bright idea is working in *your* head, Henry ?

Henry. I was thinking, Mamma, that my fables of birds and beasts are all parables ; are they not ? They are imaginary stories, and there is a moral put to each of them.

Mrs. B. Very well, Henry ; they *are*, to a certain degree, parables ; but you will find in the parables which I am going to read to you, nothing so unnatural as birds and beasts all talking together. Though the parables of Jesus Christ contain things which *did not* happen, there is nothing in them which *might not* have happened. The stories are all naturally, and simply, and beautifully told. I shall read them to you in the very words of the Bible, as nearly as I think you can understand them, now and then giving you any explanation which I may think useful to you ; and remember, both of you, to ask me anything which you do not understand, at the time, without any fear of interrupting

me ; and you know that I always like to hear your remarks as well as questions upon anything that we are reading together.

Henry. Thank you, dear Mamma ; and Mary, as you are older than me, if there is anything which you understand and I do not, you can perhaps explain it to me. May she not, Mamma ?

Mrs. B. Yes, my dear children ; in your lessons and amusements now, and in all your occupations through life, you will have many opportunities of assisting and improving each other, all of which are so many opportunities given you by a good and kind God, for making yourselves happier and better, and for pleasing Him. I am sure my two dear children will make use of these means to the utmost of their power, and be grateful to God for enabling them to be of service to others. And now good night to my dear little boy and girl ; may that great God bless you both, and make you a blessing to many others ! To-morrow we will begin our Scripture Parables.



FIRST DAY.

Parable of the Sower.

MATTHEW XIII. 3.

MARK IV. 3.

LUKE VIII. 5.

Mrs. B. I TOLD you yesterday, my loves, that you would find nothing unnatural in the parables of Jesus Christ: the one which I have chosen to begin with, will perhaps seem to you so common as hardly to be what you would call a *story*. I dare say you have yourselves seen all the circumstances happen, without paying much attention to them. "A sower," said he, "went forth to sow"

corn in his fields. "And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way-side, and" as soon as he had let them fall, "the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun was up they were scorched: and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up" with them, and growing faster, "choked them;" that is, took from them the warmth of the sun, and the nourishment of the earth, and dew, and rain, and they produced no fruit. "But other fell into good ground," properly prepared, and at the time of the harvest, *this* part had "brought forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold;" that is, a hundred, or sixty, or thirty grains of corn for every one that was sown.

Mary. Well, Mamma, but is this all the parable? I thought you said there was a *moral* to all of them, as there is in the fable book; but I see no moral here.

Mrs. B. No more did the disciples of Jesus Christ, for they came to Him, after He had finished, and desired Him to explain it. They were sure that He meant to give them some instruction, but what it was they could not tell. He was so kind as to explain it to them Himself; and we will follow the parable with His own explanation, step by step. You will remember what I told you, that in the parables, outward and visible objects were often used to represent such as are heavenly and invisible. In this instance, the hearts of men of all kinds, good and bad, are represented by the different parts of the field. We will see *what* sorts of men, by and by. "The seed is the word of God." It is religion itself—every time you learn to know more of God, every fresh commandment of His which you hear, and which you will hereafter read in the Bible, His written word, every good feeling, every wish to be good, everything which you learn of your duty to God and to your fellow-creatures, is so much "seed" sown in the "fields" of your "hearts." And does not this begin to shew

you what is the nature of a parable? Do you understand me, Mary?

Mary. I think I do a little, Mamma, but I am not very sure. You say that every thing good that we learn is represented by the seed, and our hearts by the field. Then are you the farmer, Mamma?

Mrs. B. I see, my dear Mary, that you *do* understand the parable as far as we have gone; and inasmuch as I instruct you in your duty to God and to man, I do indeed the business of the farmer. But tell me, whose seed is it that is sown? Who is it that in His word has taught *me* my duty to you, gives me health and strength to attend to it, and gives to you not only the means of instruction, but your life, your senses, your understanding, by which you can receive it?

Henry. Oh! you mean the good God, Mamma.

Mrs. B. Yes, my love, I do mean that good and great God, who has given you earthly parents to be the instruments and representatives of Himself, your heavenly Father; a parent who loves you and cares for you

even more tenderly than I do, and not for you only, but for all His children here on earth. He it is who is the good Farmer, from whom all the "seed" comes, and who plants it in the hearts of all of us, whether we choose that it should grow there or not. You will now, I think, be able to make out with a little help, what is meant by the different soils in the parable. You know I told you, the different parts of the field,—“the way-side,” the “stony ground,” the “thorny ground,” and the “good ground”—represented men of different characters. Who do you think are those by the way-side?

Mary. Who, Mamma?

Mrs. B. I want you to think a little. If you were sowing in your garden, why would you choose the mould which is well dug, rather than the gravel walk?

Mary. Because nothing would grow on the walk; the seed would not go in, it is so hard, and it would lie on the top till the birds took it.

Mrs. B. Well, my love, and however melancholy it sounds, it is yet true, that there

are some hearts which perhaps have not been properly *dug*, that is, properly *educated*, and which are so hard that they hear the commands of God, without wishing to obey them; and receive His mercies and goodness, without feeling love and reverence for His name.

Henry. Oh, Mamma! but what wicked people! I hope Mary and I shall never be like them.

Mrs. B. No, my love: indeed I hope and pray that you may not! that that great and good Being, of whom the sower in the parable is the type or representative, may keep your hearts soft and open to receive the seed which he throws into them: and may you on your parts, pray to that God who has commanded us all to "ask, and it shall be given us,"¹ that He will not suffer the devil, the great enemy of our souls, who is represented by the birds in the parable, to take the good seed out of your hearts. He is continually endeavouring to do so, and will do so, if you allow it to lie upon the

¹ Matt. vii. 7.

surface, and not to sink into the ground. If you, on your parts, are careless and inattentive, God may withdraw His grace from you. You will continually become less and less *able* to feel His mercies and His love; and the seed which was sown, having fallen upon a hard and unprepared soil, will soon be wholly lost. But God grant, my dear children, that this may never be our case! May we be neither the ground by the wayside, nor that among the stones!—Henry, do you remember what became of the seed sown there?

Henry. Yes, Mamma, I think I do. It grew up, but the sun burnt it, and it died.

Mrs. B. Quite right, Henry; and now hear how Jesus Himself explains this part of His parable. “He that received the seed in stony places, the same is he that heareth the Word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation and persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended.” Do you understand this explanation?

Mary. I think so, Mamma ; a person having root in himself, means having steadiness, does it not ?

Mrs. B. Certainly, my dear ; and without this steadiness of principle, without a firm root of love for God, of gratitude for His mercies, and of confidence in His protection and promises, the best and warmest resolutions are of no avail. The seed, indeed, springs up ; but when the sun becomes hot, that is, when persecution arises on account of religion, there is nothing to support its growth, and it withers away.

Henry. But, Mamma, why is the sun used to signify persecution ? Is not the sun good for corn ?

Mrs. B. Yes, my dear, a moderate degree of heat is not only good for it, but necessary to its growth ; it draws up the moisture of the earth below and feeds the root ; and so are trials and persecutions beneficial to the faith of sincere and well-grounded Christians ; they exercise their virtue and nourish their religion as the sun does the corn ; but those who have no foundation, no depth of

root, wither away under that which might otherwise have been their benefit.

Mary. But, Mamma, there are no such things as persecutions now, so that there can be no such people as these any longer.

Mrs. B. We have indeed reason, my love, to thank God that the days of actual persecution, the days when they who confessed themselves to be Christ's disciples were punished by bodily sufferings and death, are long since at an end; that *we* live in an age and in a country, in which a belief in the redemption wrought for us by Christ forms part of the established religion of the land. But you must not imagine on that account, that the days of "tribulation because of the Word" are at an end, or that the sincere Christian will not have to undergo many trials, whether he "hath root in himself" or not. You, my dear Henry, will, before very long, go to school, where, as in the world afterwards, you will meet with persons of all characters; with some who have been so unhappy as never to have been taught to reverence religion themselves, and

who therefore make a mock of it in others ; with many who, from different motives, will ridicule and despise your strict adherence to your principles and your religion. And believe me, my dear little boy, strange as it may appear to you, ridicule and contempt are almost as difficult to meet as the more open persecutions of fire and sword ; unless you have root in yourself, unless your belief in and love of God are thoroughly rooted in you, you will, to use the Scripture phrase, " be offended ;" or, as I have been told is the more literal translation, be " made to stumble," by the trifling, but constantly repeated persecutions of those who are really your inferiors in religious knowledge. My dear Mary has not, in this respect, so difficult a task to perform ; but even *she* may have opportunities of shewing openly that she is not to be turned aside from her duty by *persecution*, in whatever shape ; that she is not ashamed of her Saviour, who has declared that " whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed

when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels."¹ But to whatever trials God may see fit to put each of you, He will not suffer the temptation to be more than you are able to bear, if you sincerely pray to Him for assistance, and rely entirely upon Him, who is able to grant abundantly more than we can desire or deserve. He will soften "the stony ground," and give moisture sufficient to support the strongest heat, to those who sincerely apply to Him for aid.—But we have still another case to consider, that of the seed which "fell among thorns," and so was choked, and brought forth no fruit. Let me hear your idea of this, Mary.

Mary. I do not know, Mamma, but it seems to me that the thorns might represent bad companions, who lead people into doing what is wrong, and hinder them from doing what they know to be right.

Mrs. B. Your interpretation is ingenious

¹ Luke ix. 26.

enough, but it is giving a much more limited explanation of the "thorns" than was intended by the Divine Author of the parable. Hear His interpretation: "They which fell among thorns, are they which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." You see, my love, that this includes not only those who are led away by bad companions (though *they* are indeed thorns which may well choke and render unfruitful the best seed), but all who, from an over-anxiety about the things of this world, are led to neglect the service of their Maker, and the care of their own souls. Each station in life has its respective "thorns;" rich and poor, old and young, have their various objects of pursuit, any of which, when allowed to ingross the chief part of their attention, "choke the word." Amusements, intended by a kind Providence to refresh the mind and body, may be made the *business* of life. Industry, His appointed means, whereby men must provide for the temporal necessities of themselves and their

families, may be turned into an over-anxiety for the perishable goods of this life, and an indifference towards the better treasures of the world to come. Riches, the means given us by God to spread around us comfort and happiness, and to promote the welfare of our own souls, by being the faithful stewards of His bounty, may be idly and unprofitably wasted; or may, with persons of other characters, be hoarded up, and excite the desire of accumulating more without considering to what end they were given. All these, my loves, in short, all that are summed up in the three words of the Bible, "*the cares, and riches, and pleasures,*" of this world; all these are given, in such proportion as Almighty Wisdom has seen fit, for our improvement and happiness, and upon the use or abuse which we make of them in our different stations will depend our degree of happiness in a far better world.¹ We must, therefore, take care that we enjoy the good, and bear the evil, which God sends us, without allowing either the one or the other to choke in

¹ Matt. xvi. 27.

our hearts the good seed of His word, lest it become unfruitful. And now, Mary, do you see how much wider range this explanation gives to the "thorns" than you were disposed to allow them?

Mary. Yes, Mamma, and I think now I *quite* understand the whole of the parable. The seed on good ground, is of course good people, who, by God's grace, grow better and better as they grow up, till the end of their lives.

Mrs. B. Yes my dear; but you will observe that there is a difference even among those of the fourth class. "Upon them," says an excellent man as well as writer of the present day, "the word is not lost or destroyed without taking root; neither is it overborne by the opposition which it must encounter; neither is it choked among the concerns, and interests, and pleasures of the present state; but it grows among unfriendly plants, and flourishes in spite of ungenial climate; and is distinguished by the fruits of humility, piety, holiness, and charity, in which it abounds. Yet among

those who alike 'receive and understand, and keep the word,' there is not an uniform proficiency. All do not in an equal degree obtain the mastery over their natural corruptions. All do not arrive at an equal height in Christian virtue. All do not labour equally in the service of the Master to whom they have attached themselves. All produce fruit, but some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred-fold."¹ In the words in which St. Luke gives the explanation of this part of the parable, "They on the good ground are they which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."

Henry. Why does it say "with *patience*," Mamma?

Mrs. B. What would you say, Henry, to a farmer who put the seed into the ground one day, and expected to reap the crop the next?

Henry. I should say that he was very silly, Mamma; because it grows up at first

¹ Sumner's Evidences of Christianity, p. 179.

green like grass, and then it grows higher and higher, and then the ear comes, and then it turns yellow, and at last it is fit to be cut down.

Mrs. B. Well, Henry, and the case is much the same with the cultivation of the human heart. It is a work of time and of patience. The heart must be prepared to know and love God, the seed of His word must be sown, it must take deep root, it must slowly "grow with our growth, and strengthen with our strength;" care must be taken to root out all the evil weeds which might choke it; it must be ripened by difficulties and trials, probably by affliction also; and the grace of God, constantly and devoutly prayed for, must ever assist His own work, and aid the fruit to come to perfection. And then, at the great day of harvest, when it shall be gathered together, good and bad, may He, my dear children, mercifully grant, that we may be of the number of those whom He "shall gather as *wheat* into his garner;"¹ there to enjoy for ever and

¹ Luke iii. 17.

ever a happiness, though far exceeding all human understanding, yet equitably proportioned to the fruit which we have produced from His seed, in this world of trial. And let us never forget that according to the seed sown, according to the opportunities given to us of improvement, will God most justly expect that the future crop shall be: that "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."¹ But upon this particular subject we will take another parable to-morrow. Meantime, I hope you have understood, and will remember, what we have gone through to-day.

Mary. Yes, Mamma, thank you, I think I quite understand it now; and I am sure I never thought, when you first read the parable, that there could be so much hidden in it.

Henry. Nor I, Mamma; I shall never see them sowing in the fields now without thinking of this parable.

Mrs. B. You will do well, my dear, on all

¹ Luke xii. 48.

occasions, to let your thoughts turn habitually to the goodness and mercy of God, and to His commandments: and to a mind properly disposed, there is nothing which may not suggest the idea of Him, who is at all times your surest guide, and friend, and protector. And now we will close our reading for to-day. To-morrow, if I have reason to be satisfied with you, we will begin at the same hour.





SECOND DAY.

Parable of the Talents.

MATTHEW XXV. 14.

LUKE XIX. 12.

Mrs. B. You remember, my dears, that in the parable which we read yesterday, we saw that the seed, which fell on good ground, and brought forth fruit, some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred-fold, was designed to represent those good persons, who, to use the words of the Bible, “in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience,”¹

¹ Luke viii. 15.

but who do not all make an equal proficiency: to carry on the same comparison, upon which part of his field do you suppose the farmer would look with the greatest pleasure and satisfaction?

Henry. On the good ground, of course.

Mrs. B. And of the good ground, upon that which produced thirty, or sixty, or a hundred-fold?

Henry. Upon that which produced a hundred.

Mrs. B. Yes, my love: and so you may be sure will the heavenly Sower of the Word look with love and mercy upon *all* who have served Him faithfully in this life; but with *more* approbation, the more we serve Him, and strive to "bring forth the fruit" of His word in this life. Nay, we are even assured that we have it in our power to add, by our conduct here, to the happiness even of the blessed angels in heaven.

Henry. Oh! Mamma; you do not mean that the angels care about what is done by such a little boy as I am!

Mrs. B. My love, our knowledge, while we

are in this life, of what passes in heaven, of the nature and feelings of its blessed inhabitants, must be very imperfect: but of this we are assured by Jesus Christ Himself, that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."¹ And we cannot but believe that beings, infinitely good and holy, must delight in seeing others making advances, however slowly, towards the same state of perfection and happiness. But this has taken us a little away from the subject of our parable, which, as you remember, was to illustrate our different degrees of goodness; and which will also shew us what will be the dealings of a just and merciful God with regard to them. Bear this in mind, and I think you will understand, without much explanation, the parable of the nobleman and his servants. There are indeed two parables on this subject; one in the Gospel of St. Matthew, the other in that of St. Luke; many parts of

¹ Luke xv. 7.

which are word for word the same, and which are generally so much alike, that we may safely consider them together, and take the words sometimes from one, and sometimes from the other.

“A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom,” (or to take possession of an estate which belonged to him,) “and to return. And he called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods, and said unto them, Occupy” (or employ to the best advantage) “till I come. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.”

Mary. Mamma, I beg your pardon for interrupting you; but is not a talent a sum of money?

Mrs. B. Yes, my love; you are quite right to ask the question. A talent was a sum of money, or rather a quantity of gold or silver, amounting to a certain weight. St. Luke uses, instead of talent, the word “pound;” but it is sufficient to know, that a sum

of money, no matter how large or small, is intended.

“Then,” continues St. Matthew, “he that had received the five talents, went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise, he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one, went and digged in the earth, and hid his Lord’s money. After a long time, the Lord of those servants cometh, and commandeth them to be called unto him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. And so he that had received five talents, came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents, behold I have gained beside them five talents more. His Lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. He also that had received two talents, came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents, behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His Lord said

unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. Then he which had received the one talent, came and said, Lord, I knew thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo! there thou hast that is thine. His Lord answered and said unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked and slothful servant. Thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed, wherefore then gavest not thou thy money into the bank, that at my coming I might have received mine own with usury?" (or interest for money lent.) "Take, therefore, the talent from him, and give it unto him that hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath."

Henry. But surely, Mamma, that was not

quite fair : was it ? For the man who had already ten talents could not want any more, and the other did.

Mrs. B. We will go over the parable line by line, and see what moral we can draw from it ; and I think we shall shew you, Henry, before we have done, that you have been rather hasty in judging, and therefore have judged wrong. And now to begin our examination. Who is meant, think you, Henry, by the nobleman and his servants ? or can you tell me, Mary ?

Mary. Yes, Mamma, I think I can ; I think I understand it all quite well.

Mrs. B. All quite well ! that is saying a good deal.

Mary. I mean, Mamma, that I thought while you were reading, I could make out what each part meant, and how it all applied.

Mrs. B. Well, my dear, I am glad to hear that you have been able to follow the general meaning so far : but depend upon it, you will find in this, as in all the other parables, that though the general line of comparison may be plain and simple enough, the more

we enlarge upon, and consider each particular point, the more hidden meaning we shall discover, and the more good we may do to our own minds ; and the case is, perhaps, stronger in no one parable than in this. And now for your explanation, Mary.

Mary. I think, Mamma, that the nobleman means God ; that we are his servants, and that when He returns, that is, at the last day, He will call us to account for the good or the evil we have done, and reward or punish us accordingly.

Mrs. B. Well, my love, you are quite right in your general view ; but we may, I think, go a little further into details than you have done, before we quit the parable. How, for instance, do you interpret the sum of money intrusted to us ?

Mary. Is it not the means we have of doing good ?

Mrs. B. To others, do you mean ; or to ourselves also ?

Mary. I meant to others, Mamma ; but I suppose it may mean both.

Mrs. B. And if it does, which indeed it

may be said to do, what a boundless field does it open to us ! What, indeed, is there, which may not, if improved, be made the means of good to ourselves or others ? Not our worldly advantages only, not only our good dispositions, not only our pious and virtuous feelings, but our joys, our sorrows, our trials, even our evil inclinations, (which are trials,) all our whole state of being, and every circumstance of our lives, *may* be made "the means of good to ourselves or others." All these are, in fact, part of the talents, the stock in trade, which our heavenly Master has put into our hands, for the employment of which He will call us to account when He comes to make His reckoning.

Mary. Oh ! but, Mamma, what a terrible idea ! How could we ever give such an account ?

Mrs. B. The idea is not a *terrible* one to a Christian, my love, who considers that he serves a merciful, though a just Master ; one who knows the infirmities of His creatures, and has accepted, as an atonement for our sins and imperfections, the perfect sacrifice

of His own Son Jesus Christ ; but it is an *awful* idea, even to the best of Christians : and one which may well lead us to consider seriously the responsibility under which we stand, for our use of things seemingly indifferent. But though the comparison would equally hold good throughout, even were it pushed to its furthest limit, we will not go so far : we will consider the “talents” committed to us, to mean our good dispositions, and the advantages of our respective stations in life ; in other words, our capacities for serving God and men. And now, my loves, observe, in the first place, the *unequal distribution* of these advantages. “Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one ; and to every man according to his several ability.” And *our* Master has adopted the same line of proceeding in His government of the world : not all are rich, not all prosperous, not all endowed with distinguished abilities : some are born to poverty and suffering, some to sickness and infirmity of body, some to weakness of intellect. Even you may have seen different

children with different dispositions, more or less good-tempered, liberal, industrious; one learning quickly, and soon perhaps forgetting; another slow, but retaining in the memory what he has learnt. "But all these," as the Apostle St. Paul says, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, "worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will:"¹ or, in the words of the parable, "to every man according to his several ability;" according, that is, in our case as He sees best for us, and for His own eternal purposes. He places us each in our respective stations, allots to us our respective duties, and gives us our respective powers, and capacities of body and of mind.

Henry. How wonderful, Mamma! One gets quite puzzled in thinking how God can know and arrange for all the world.

Mrs. B. Wonderful, indeed, my dear Henry, is He in all His ways, and far above our comprehension is that all-mighty and all-knowing mind which provides for the

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 11.

wants of every single creature, not only in this world, but perhaps in hundreds and thousands of other worlds beyond our knowledge. But let us return to the subject which we are more immediately considering just now. For what purpose did the nobleman give his servants these different sums of money? did he give them, or lend them, or entrust them to their keeping?

Mary. He entrusted them, Mamma, and said that they must employ them to the best advantage, till he came back.

Mrs. B. Very well remembered, Mary; and now what do you understand by this?

Mary. I understand, Mamma, that God has entrusted to us good dispositions, and that we are to make the most of them, and to keep them always exercised.

Mrs. B. Very well, indeed; it is a pleasure to me to teach, when I find you attentive and endeavouring to profit by my instructions. And if we do so exercise our good dispositions, and cultivate our capacities for good, we are assured by the parable that the dispositions and capacities will them-

selves be perpetually increased. Besides our first five, we shall have gained five other talents. But observe, that we are not only to "trade," or endeavour to increase our store of good till we have gained a certain point, but we are to "occupy till our master cometh." What does this mean, Henry?

Henry. Does it not mean, Mamma, that we are always to try to do better and better till our death?

Mrs. B. Yes, my dear boy; the day of our death will be to each of us the time when our accounts shall be closed, and when our faithful service, however poor and humble, if it *have* been *faithful* and zealous, will be accepted by a Master who is a God of mercy. But supposing the servant to whom five talents had been given had begun by being very industrious, and after a little time had gained two more; suppose he had then rested satisfied, do you think he would then have been entitled to hear "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?"

Henry. No, Mamma, I do not suppose he would: and yet the other servant only gained two talents more than he had at first, and he had the same thing said to him.

Mrs. B. Do you remember what we read yesterday, "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required, and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more?"¹ It is not the extent of our acquirements which God will consider, so much as the proportion which they bear to our original advantages. I will explain this to you at once by the parable. It is very true, as you say, that one servant gained five talents, and the other only two, and yet their master was equally satisfied with them: but to the one he had originally given five, and the servant, by his industry, had gained one for each of the five; to the other he gave two, and he also had gained one for each of the two. To the third he gave one, and had he also gained one, he would also have met

¹ Luke xii. 48.

with his master's approbation—he would have done equally well, because his means of improvement were smaller. Had the first servant only gained two talents, having received five, he would not have been as industrious in proportion to his power, and would not have deserved his master's approbation.

Henry. Thank you, Mamma; I see now that I was mistaken, and that it was all quite fair. But then, Mamma, you do not mean that whether we are more or less good, if we are as good as we can be, we shall be rewarded the same in heaven?

Mrs. B. My love, for our own actions we can hope for no *reward*; for even the best of us, “when we have done all,” may say, with truth, that we are only “unprofitable servants.”¹ But we may rest assured that all who faithfully serve God here, whether their capacities on earth have been great or small, will have their services accepted of their Master: and that our future state of happiness will be in

¹ Luke xvii. 10.

proportion, not to our *means* here, but to the use we make of them. The parable related by St. Luke supposes each of the servants to have received the same sum. The first gains by trading, ten pounds, the second five. In this case, as you see, each having the same advantages, the gain of one is much greater than the other. What then is the answer of their Lord? To both he says, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant:" but to the first he gives "authority over ten cities;" to the second "authority over five cities." To each he gives a reward, but a reward in proportion to the respective gains of each. And our Saviour says Himself, in another place, "In my Father's house are many mansions,"¹ in agreement with that truth, confirmed by many passages of Scripture, that there will be different degrees of reward and enjoyment in heaven, proportioned to our capacities for receiving them. There "shall we know even as we are known"² to God; and all the doubts and uncertainties which we must feel here will there be re-

¹ John xiv. 2.

² 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

moved for ever. Meanwhile we may rest assured of this, that we have no hard master to serve; that "His yoke is easy and His burden light."¹ He views with equal eyes the high and low, rich and poor, great and small; and holiness and goodness are the only means whereby we may hope to see Him. But if we neglect the "talents" entrusted to our care, if we refuse to cherish and foster our good dispositions, and suffer them to be overcome by evil, consider what was the case of the "wicked and slothful servant." Once more, remember, the money was entrusted, for the especial purpose of trading—he had the commands of his master so to employ it; instead of which, he buried it in the earth, and when his master returned, endeavoured to excuse himself by pretending that fear of misusing it had induced him to bury it in the ground where it had lain idle for many years.

Henry. Well, Mamma, but he paid it back again, just as he received it.

Mrs. B. Were those the orders of his

¹ Matt. xi. 30.

master? Does not our Master say to us, I give you faculties, and dispositions, and opportunities of doing good: I order you to cultivate them, and make the most of them? Would it, do you think, be an answer, were we to say to our Lord, "Lord, I possessed till my death all the faculties Thou gavest me; but I never exercised them; I was afraid of doing wrong, and I did no good: I let all my good dispositions lie idle, all my opportunities pass away." And would not God justly say "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked and slothful servant? While others have gained ten-fold, thirty-fold, a hundred-fold of what I entrusted to them, thou, with the same opportunities, hast wasted and misused thy talents?" And now follows what appeared to Henry to be injustice. "Because thou hast so wasted them, they shall be thine no longer. I take from thee that of which thou madest no good use, and I give yet more and more to him who has proved himself a good and faithful servant: he has been faithful over a little,

he has now entered into the joy of his Lord : he shall have the opportunity, even now, of proving more and more his faithfulness, and gaining yet more the love of his master." Is there any injustice in this, Henry ?

Henry. Oh no, Mamma ! But it sounds very different now ; there was something, I forget the words, about giving to him that had, and taking away from him that had not, which seemed very strange.

Mrs. B. Well, my love, I will repeat the words you mean, and consider them as I have just explained them. "Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance ; but from him that hath not" (that is, from him who has either wasted or not improved the talent entrusted to him) "shall be taken away even that which he hath."¹

Mary. Mamma, it seems to me that it is like the seed sown by the way-side, which you said the devil was suffered to take away from the hearts which were too hard for it to grow.

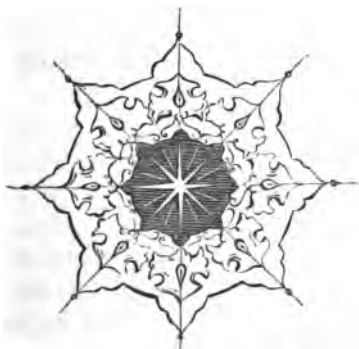
¹ Matt. xxv. 29.

Mrs. B. Yes, my dear girl, it is, in great measure, the same case. You have very well illustrated the one parable by the other; and as in the former case you saw no injustice, so, I think, you will not fancy any here.

Henry. Oh no, Mamma! I see now that you have explained it, and I will not be so hasty another time. But, Mamma, what would the nobleman have done if the servant had not brought back the money at all?

Mrs. B. My love, if God finds fault with and punishes those who do not improve their capacities, what will He do to those who pervert and turn them to evil? The larger the sum entrusted, the greater the guilt; the greater the abilities of good, the more awful is the sin of not only neglecting them, but perverting them to a contrary purpose. Upon the fate of such, God has not left us in doubt; and though He has mercifully concealed from our knowledge what will be their punishment, He has left it to be conjectured, by figures which paint it in the most awful terms, but which I will

not at present read to you. Oh, my dear children! may you ever strive faithfully to exercise *your* respective "talents;" and pray to Him for His aid and counsel throughout your life, that at the last great day of reckoning, you and I may hear addressed to us these blessed words, "Well done, ye good and faithful servants; enter ye into the joy of your Lord!"





THIRD DAY.

Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Pieces of Silber.

LUKE XV. 4

“MAMMA,” said Mary, (when the little party were again assembled for their daily reading, and, as Henry called it, *dissection* of the parables,) “when we were talking yesterday about the angels, did you not say that ‘there was joy among them over one sinner that repented, more than over

ninety and nine just people who needed no repentance?’ I meant to have asked you then, but I did not like to interrupt you, whether this was not very odd, that they should like a repentant sinner better than a thoroughly good man, who never did any thing wrong? Is not this an encouragement to do wrong first, that we may be good afterwards?”

Mrs. B. I do not wonder at your asking the question, but you have not put the case quite fairly. It is nowhere asserted in Scripture, nor does our knowledge of their nature allow us to suppose, that God Himself or His holy angels regard with more *love* and *good will* the penitent criminal, than the perseveringly good and sincere Christian; the expression is, as you correctly quoted it, that there is more *joy*; and joy no doubt in proportion to the compassionate sorrow they had felt for the former wickedness and danger of the offender. Surely, there is nothing unnatural in this feeling, as far as we can judge of the feelings of heavenly beings by our own—still less any thing which could by

possibility justify or encourage such dangerous wickedness as you suppose. Do you remember last year, when we heard that the ship in which your uncle had taken his passage to come home from the West Indies was lost, and that every person on board had perished, and we thought for some weeks that he was dead?

Henry. Yes, Mamma; and I remember my uncle told us afterwards, that he had been just going on board, when he was stopped about some business which he thought very provoking just then, though afterwards he found out that it had saved his life.

Mrs. B. Very true, my dear boy; and this will shew us how little we really know what *is* good for us, and what *is not*, but there is *One* who knows, in whom we may safely trust. But what I wanted to impress upon you was, what you cannot have forgotten, how far more lively was our joy and gratitude to that merciful Providence, who had preserved your uncle, when we with reason thought him lost, than it would have been, had we never thought him in any danger.

In the same manner, we cannot doubt but that benevolent beings, as the angels undoubtedly are, should feel a more lively joy at seeing a soul which had been in danger of suffering everlastingly, brought to a sense of its danger, and repenting truly of its past sins, than if that soul had indeed been "a just man who needed no repentance." But where, my dear children, shall we find such a person? Who can say that he needs no repentance? "For in many things," says St. James, "we all offend."¹ And knowing our own unworthiness, the unworthiness of the best among us to be accepted of God, it is surely consoling to know also that our sincere repentance for our past sins, and our earnest endeavour to avoid them for the future, can give "joy to the angels in heaven." But before we can hope to do so, let us consider a little what is required of us, and let us take the three parables which the Bible affords us in illustration of this subject.

Henry. What, Mamma, are there *three* parables on this one subject?

¹ James iii. 2.

Mrs. B. Yes, my love. The first two indeed are parables, in the literal sense of the word, *comparisons*; not stories at length, but short allusions to circumstances which might happen any day in common life. The third is one of the longest, one of the most detailed, and, at least as it has always struck me, the most beautiful of any in the Bible. We will begin with the two short ones first, and I think we shall hardly have time to go through the whole three to-day.

Jesus in the course of His preaching had not disdained to associate with persons who were looked down upon, and despised by the Pharisees.

Henry. Who were the Pharisees, Mamma?

Mrs. B. They were a sect, my love, or party among the Jews, who were very strict observers of all the customs and ceremonies commanded by the law of Moses; and who seemed to think that so long as they carefully obeyed the letter of the law, it mattered little, in comparison, what was the state of their thoughts and hearts. These persons took offence at our Saviour for con-

versing familiarly with notorious sinners. Now the Pharisees would have been quite right, if Jesus had made Himself a companion of these persons, in order to encourage them in their wickedness, or to share in it; but, on the contrary, He went among them to withdraw them from their bad practices, to shew them how sinful they were, and to teach them the ways of religion and of peace. But the Pharisees did not believe or did not understand this; Jesus, however, instead of being angry with them, condescended to explain the reasons of His conduct. "They that are whole," said He on one occasion, "need not a physician, but they that are sick"¹—that is, as a physician goes to heal, not those who are well, but those who are diseased; so I, who am the great Physician of the soul, and whose great object is to cure men of their sins, and give to their minds health and comfort, need not go to the righteous (if any such there be) but to those whose souls are diseased, and who have need of the healing medicine of my

¹ Luke v. 31.

words: to them I go, that I may cure them of their sickness, by leading them to repentance, and forgiving their sins.

On another occasion, He answered the same objections by the two parables which I have already mentioned to you.

“What man of you,” He said, “having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulder rejoicing; and when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

Henry. But, Mamma, was it not very foolish of him to leave all his other sheep, to look for this one? Might not they have run away too, while he was looking for the other?

Mrs. B. My love, we must understand that he left the remainder under proper care; for God, who is our good Shepherd, never ceases to care for any of His flock; but the expression is only a strong one, to signify the

earnest solicitude of our Heavenly Father, more especially shewn in the earthly mission of His blessed Son, to reclaim sinners, His wandering sheep, from the errors of their past life, and to bring them home to their proper fold. But although the *immediate* purpose of this comparison was to shew that, in the sight of God, none of His creatures are to be despised, or thought unworthy of being saved from the consequences of their own wanderings and misconduct, yet there is a second sense in which this part of the parable may be taken. In this second sense, each man must himself be considered as the shepherd, who has a certain number of sheep entrusted to him. And this view of the first parable is, perhaps, more clearly shewn by the second, with which our Saviour follows up the former. “Either what woman”—

Mary. Oh, Mamma! but had not we better finish one before we begin the other? I am afraid of getting puzzled if we begin two together.

Mrs. B. Do you remember, my dear Mary, that you assisted yesterday in the expla-

nation of one part of one parable, by remembering what had been said upon another the day before? You may depend upon it, that for young or old there is no better way of coming at the real meaning, and full explanation of any one passage in Scripture, than by comparing it with other passages of the same sacred book; and I can engage that you shall not be *puzzled* by examining these two parables at once. Indeed, they are placed one immediately after the other in St. Luke's Gospel, from which I have taken them, evidently with an intention of explaining one by the other. "Either," our Lord says, "what women, having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which was lost."

Mary. I see, Mamma, that we shall not be puzzled, at least I think not, because the two parables mean the same thing, only one

is a man losing a sheep, and the other is a woman losing a piece of silver.

Mrs. B. Exactly so, my dear ; and I have read the two together, because one may serve to explain expressions in the other. For instance, in the second parable, it is not supposed, that because the woman had lost one piece of silver, she took no care of the other nine, as you, Henry, imagined the shepherd did about his sheep. It only says, "she swept the house, and *searched diligently*, till she found" that which was missing.

Henry. I see that, Mamma ; but after all, I don't understand what all the parable means. I am rather puzzled with your two explanations, and two meanings.

Mrs. B. I will try if I can make it clear to you. You remember the parable which we read together yesterday, of the nobleman and his servants ? You remember also the punishment of the servant who brought the unemployed money in the napkin, and defended himself for not having employed it to more purpose ?

Henry. Yes, Mamma, I remember all that very well.

Mrs. B. What do you suppose would have been the sentence of the nobleman, if, instead of bringing it unemployed, he had altogether lost it?

Henry. I should think, Mamma, he would have punished him still more severely.

Mrs. B. But suppose the servant, instead of vindicating himself, had come at once to his master, had confessed his own negligence, and begged to be pardoned for his fault; what do you think a kind master would do? Would he not forgive him his past negligence, at the same time recommending to him to search again for that which he had lost, assist him to find it, and advise him to be more careful in keeping it, and improving it for the future?

Henry. I think he would be very indulgent if he did so much for him.

Mrs. B. Not more indulgent, my dear boy, than the merciful God is to all those who truly turn to Him with penitent hearts, acknowledging their past sins, and earnestly

endeavouring to amend their lives. And now, my dears, let us consider the woman's piece of silver, as we did the talents before, as "a good disposition, a capacity for good," and let us see what moral we can make out. In the first place, what was the woman's fault?

Henry. I do not see that she was in any fault, Mamma; she could not help losing the money, and she set about looking for it directly.

Mary. Yes, Henry, she might; if she had minded where she put it, and what she did with it, it would never have been lost at all.

Mrs. B. Right, my dear girl. Her fault was carelessness and inattention to the value of that which she possessed; and depend upon it, in the moral point of view, we have need of full as much watchfulness over ourselves and our dispositions, as over our earthly possessions, which in the end are of far less value to us.

Mary. But, Mamma, I know it is necessary to be very careful to avoid a fault which one is inclined to; but if one has naturally a good disposition, one cannot lose it, can one?

Mrs. B. Do you know Mr.——, who called here the other day?

Henry. What, that fretful, ill-tempered man, who always looks so discontented with every thing, and ready to quarrel with every body?

Mrs. B. That very fretful, discontented looking man was at school with your father, and I have heard him say, that there never was a boy who naturally had a finer temper; but from being always humoured and indulged, he became gradually selfish, impatient of contradiction, and certainly has now a temper which renders him disagreeable, not only to other people, but to himself.

Mary. But if he was always so spoilt, that was not his fault, Mamma.

Mrs. B. He is certainly very much to be pitied for having been treated so foolishly when he was a child. But I only mentioned him as an instance how the best dispositions, unless carefully watched, will, like the piece of silver, be "lost" to their owners. It is the same with the powers of the mind, memory

or instance, as it is with the moral virtues ; and these also, remember, it is our duty to keep up and to attend to, if we mean to be as useful in the world, as our Creator intended we should ; but we are at present considering rather virtues than talents.

Mary. Well, but Mamma, if our good dispositions are so lost, what can we do to recover them ?

Mrs. B. What is it said in the parable that the woman did, when she discovered that she had lost the piece of silver ?

Mary. She swept the house diligently till she found it.

Mrs. B. Well, Henry, and what did your friend the shepherd do, when he discovered the loss of his sheep ?

Henry. He went after it, and left all the rest till he had found it.

Mrs. B. Well, my loves ; and so should a good Christian do, and so *would* a good Christian do, when he perceived that he had “lost” any good disposition which he formerly possessed ; that he was more easily provoked, more selfish, less generous, less charitable to

his neighbours, less sensible of the mercies, less careful of the approbation, of his God, than he used to be. He would "sweep the house diligently," he would pray earnestly to God, that by His assistance he might be enabled to "cleanse the thoughts of his heart" from all impurity, from all that might hide and smother his good qualities. He would, like the shepherd, leave for the time in great measure every other care, he would apply his whole attention to remedy the evil, to "find" again that which he had lost—nor would he cease from his exertions, till, by the mercy and grace of God, following his prayers and good resolutions, he had succeeded in finding it.

Henry. O Mamma ! I see *quite* now what your second explanation means, and I think I understand it better than I did the first. And then how happy it would be to call all one's friends, and tell them that one was become so good !

Mrs. B. There would be but little of a Christian spirit, my dear boy, in such boasting to our friends ; for the very best of us

must feel that they have many sins to answer for. "There is none good," says our Lord, "but One, that is God;"¹ and our religion teaches us always to think rather of our many sins than of our few approaches to goodness. "Let nothing be done," says St. Paul, "through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves."² I do not say, however, that you might not feel in your own conscience that happiness which always accompanies a successful attempt to conquer a bad inclination, or to encourage a good one. Our best endeavours to serve God are but very imperfect, and cannot, of themselves, be satisfactory to Him; but for the sake of our Saviour Jesus Christ He will accept of them, if we make them honestly: and though we must not call together our *earthly* friends, we may remember, with joy and gratitude, that we have *heavenly* friends rejoicing over every successful attempt that we make to become more virtuous, and less unworthy of the goodness of God. And this we have on

¹ Luke xviii. 19.² Phil. ii. 3.

the authority of the Bible itself; for each of these two parables ends thus, and the verse is repeated at the close of each: "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Henry. Then do you mean, Mamma, that whenever I am inclined to be naughty, and fight against my inclination, I may think that the angels are really glad that I am trying to be good?

Mrs. B. You may not only think, but be sure, my dear little boy, that not only the angels, but the great God Himself, sees you, and rejoices, and loves you with a love far greater even than your earthly father or I feel for you. The best actions of the best persons on earth are unworthy to be considered by the great Governor and Father of all the universe; but the *least* good actions of the least among us, are not lost upon Him, who knoweth whereof we are made, who measures our capacities, and accepts our poorest endeavours in His service. Upon this subject, however, we will go more at

length to-morrow, for to-day's reading has already taken us up nearly our usual time, and I think we shall have a good deal to say upon the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Mary. Oh, Mamma! may not we go on to-day? I am not at all tired.

Mrs. B. No, my love; I have other things to do, and I cannot go beyond our time; and it would be a pity to begin so beautiful a parable without going through it. So we will shut the book till to-morrow.





FOURTH DAY.

Parable of the Prodigal Son.

LUKE XV. 11.

Mrs. B. WELL, my loves : I see you are come very exactly at our time for the parables.

Henry. Oh yes, Mamma, I do so like these readings ! and Mary and I both think that we make out the parables better every day. But will you begin, Mamma, with the one that you said yesterday was so beautiful ?

Mrs. B. You are in a great hurry, Henry, but bring me the book, and we will lose no time. The parable immediately following those which we read yesterday in St. Luke's Gospel, is that of the Prodigal Son. It is partly upon the same subject as the former ones; but as almost every word in it is of consequence, I think we had better read it through without stopping for remarks, and then begin with it over again, and take it bit by bit.—“A certain man,” said Jesus, “had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.’ And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country. And he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would” gladly have satisfied his hunger “with the husks that

the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him."

Mary. Poor man, how very miserable he must have been! And how very sorry that he had ever left his father's house! But go on, Mamma, I will not stop you. What did he do?

Mrs. B. You shall hear, my love.—"And when he came to himself, he said: How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants."

Henry. That's right, that's right! You see, Mary, he *was* very sorry. Well, Mamma!

Mrs. B. "And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

Mary. O, Mamma, I am so glad! and I

don't know why, but I could cry, though I am very glad for him.

Mrs. B. "And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came, and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound."

Henry. What a pleasant surprise for him, Mamma! How glad he must have been when he came in, to hear such good news, and to see his brother again!

Mrs. B. Wait a little — “And he was angry, and would not go in.”

Henry. Angry, Mamma! Angry that his brother was come back? What could he be angry about?

Mrs. B. If you will let me read on, you shall hear what he had to say for himself. “He was angry and would not go in, therefore came his father out and entreated him.”

Henry. I am very sure, if I had been his father, I would not have done any such thing.

Mrs. B. (laughing.) My dear Henry, if you are so *very* indignant, we shall never finish the parable.

Henry. Well, Mamma, I will wait if I can: but what a strange man to be angry because his brother was come home!

Mrs. B. May I go on? “And he answering said to his father, Lo these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandments; and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath” wasted thy substance

in riotous living, "thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

Mary. But surely, Mamma, Henry is quite right. I cannot understand how anybody could be so wicked as to think of being angry at such a time.

Mrs. B. No, my dear children, I bless God that I think you do not know the vice of envy, nor the torments it brings upon those who are capable of it; but we will finish the parable, and keep our remarks, if we can, for our second reading of it. Hear the kind father's answer,—“And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.”

Mary. Well, Mamma, you were quite right; that is a very beautiful parable, but I am so glad that the poor younger son came back, and that his father was so kind to him.

Mrs. B. “Likewise,” says Jesus Christ unto us all, “there is joy in the presence of

the angels of God over" every "sinner that repenteth." But let us now examine the parable bit by bit, to see what moral for our own conduct, and what knowledge of the mercy and goodness of God, we can draw from it.

Henry. I had forgotten the moral, Mamma; I had forgotten that it applied to *us*; I was only thinking of the people in the parable.

Mrs. B. And now, Henry, that you remember there *is* an application to be made, do you think you can make it? Do you think you can tell me whom the people in the parable are meant to represent?

Henry. Yes, Mamma, I think I can; the father means God, and the two sons no, Mamma, I am not sure about the sons.

Mrs. B. Well, my love, we will leave them for a little while. God, the great and Almighty God, is, as you suppose, represented by the kind and merciful father; and this endearing term is one in which He delights, in his written word, to represent Himself.

We are directed, as you know, in what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer, and which was taught to His disciples by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, to pray to God as, "Our Father in heaven;" and in the Psalms we are told, that "like as a father pitieth his own children, even so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."¹ You, my dear children, cannot know *all* the strength of these expressions; but who do you suppose on earth loves you the most? Who feels the most sorrow when you do wrong? Who is the most happy when you are good?

Both Children. Oh, you, Mamma, and Papa!

Mrs. B. Yes, my loves, I believe we do love you both, as well as earthly parents can love, and yet believe me, dear children, our love for you, and our care of you, are far, far less, than those which the Almighty God extends to all His creatures. He is the tenderest of fathers, the most careful of parents. He it is who has made us, who hourly watches over us, and protects us all; who

¹ Psalm ciii. 13.

has redeemed us from the consequences of our own sin, who forgives us, and who will finally, if we pray to Him and love Him, receive us to dwell with Him in everlasting happiness.

Mary. But, Mamma, wait a moment, for it quite puzzles one to think how God can know and attend to so many, many thousand people as there are in all the world.

Mrs. B. My love, we may go on endlessly contemplating the wonders of the omniscience of that God, who is "over all from the beginning," who knows all the secrets of every heart, beholds every part of the creation at one glance, and rules and governs all according to his pleasure—"Such knowledge," as David says in the Psalms, "is too wonderful for us"—we "cannot attain unto it."¹ But the greater and the more wonderful is God, the greater is His condescension, His love, in humbling "Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth:"² and knowing all this, how implicitly should we trust to His almighty

¹ Psalm cxxxix. 6.

² Psalm cxlii. 6.

goodness and fatherly care over us! If your father or I tell you to do anything here, you know that it is told you for your own good. How much more, then, should we always think this of a Heavenly Father, who cannot be mistaken, whose knowledge is infinite, and whose love is greatly beyond all that we can conceive! How careful ought we to be in all things, to be obedient, affectionate, dutiful children, to so heavenly, so indulgent a Father! But to return to the parable: you cannot make out, Henry, who the two sons are? Can you, Mary?

Mary. Are they not meant for good people, and wicked people; taking one of each as an example?

Mrs. B. I fear, my love, there are few who can justly call themselves *good* people. But you are so far right, that the two sons do represent two classes of persons;¹

¹ I have thought it better to take, in the first instance, the practical explanation, as applying to all ages of the world, and not to perplex the minds of children with the interpretation of the two sons as applying to the Jews and Gentiles.

the one, those who endeavour to live after the commandments, and as if, in the presence of God Himself, their Heavenly Father: and the other, those who forsake his protection, and follow the sinful inclinations of their own hearts. And now see, my dear children, what is the first mistaken step of the prodigal son? What was the first thing that is told of him?

Henry. He went and asked his father to give him the portion of goods which belonged to him.

Mrs. B. Quite right, my dear Henry; but what then? Can either of you go on?

Mary. He took his journey into a far country, and there

Mrs. B. Stop, my dear girl; we have got beyond the *first* mistake. "He took his journey into a *far* country;" he left the security of his father's house; he trusted to his own prudence and judgment; he thought that he was able to manage his own affairs better than his father could manage them for him—that he needed no assistance, no

advice ; he “gathered together” the property which was to be his, and which, we must suppose, he ought to have employed, like the “talents,” in trading, for the purpose of increasing his stock.

Mary. Oh ! now I see, Mamma, you mean that we ought not to take ourselves out of the guidance and protection of God, and trust to our own sense to direct us.

Mrs. B. You have taken my meaning very well, my dear Mary ; or rather I should say, not my meaning, but the meaning of Him who made the parable, and who knows that “we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves.”¹ And yet how often do we think that we could arrange things for ourselves better than the Providence of our Almighty Father arranges them for us ! How often are we foolishly discontented with trifling things which happen to us, and which, after the momentary vexation is past, have no influence upon our comfort or happiness ! Is not this to withdraw ourselves from our Father’s house ; to take the portion which falleth to

¹ Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent.

us, and to employ it according to our own inclinations and fancies?

Mary. But, Mamma, why did the father allow his son to take all that money, if he thought he would make such a bad use of it?

Mrs. B. If we are to take the question as of an *earthly* father, we must suppose that the son was of that age when legally the father could not refuse to allot to him his maintenance. If we are to consider it as applying to "our Father in heaven," we must remember the case of the talents again, and that, unless we have our portion, in a certain sense, at our own disposal, there can be no trial of our good or our evil dispositions. We have all, even the least among us, something to manage for ourselves—some talents of which we are to make the most. But after our stock, or "the portion that falleth to" us, has been put into our hands, it remains in our own choice how far we will submit the disposal of it to the commands and recommendation of a Heavenly Father; how far we will still, though entrusted with

the conduct of our own affairs, continue in our Father's house ; or how far we choose to wander "into a far country," remove ourselves from His superintending care, cease to consult His wishes, and employ our time, our talents, our fortune, and whatever else is entrusted to us, according to the "devices and desires of our own heart," and not in obedience to His commands and fatherly wishes.

Henry. How you bring out new meanings, Mamma! things that I should never have thought of, if you had not told me.

Mrs. B. Yes, my love, you would, if you diligently applied yourself, as I trust, when you are older, you will do, to the attentive study of the Bible. You will then find, what the Bible itself declares, that "all Scripture was written for our learning ;"¹ but you will also find, that in order to derive benefit from it, we must carefully study it, and search for its hidden meanings, with earnest prayer to God, that He will

¹ Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent. Rom. xv. 4.

“open our understandings, that we may understand the Scriptures.”¹ The Jews at Berea are commended by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, inasmuch as they “searched the Scriptures daily;”² and so, if we mean to derive the proper benefit from them must we also; and, for our comfort, we may be sure of this, that the more we search the more we shall obtain. But to go on with our parable, which will take us, I fear, a longer time than we can spare for it to-day. After leaving his father’s house, what did this foolish young man do? Do you remember, Henry?

Henry. Yes, Mamma; he spent all that he had, and came to great distress.

Mrs. B. But *how* did he spend it? Was it by misfortune in his business that he became poor, or by his own fault? What does the parable say that he did?

Henry. He spent it in riotous living.

Mrs. B. He seems, my love, to have got among idle and wicked people, with whom he forgot the order and regularity of his

¹ Luke xxiv. 45.

² Acts xvii. 11.

father's household, and the precepts of virtue and of religion which he had learnt there: to have followed a life of extravagance, and what is very falsely called *pleasure*, thinking of nothing but the amusement of the moment, till he found that he had spent all his money, and that in a time of general distress, he was in absolute want and famine. And so it will be with us also, if we withdraw ourselves from the protection of our Almighty Father; if we cease to pray for His assistance, to rely upon His guidance; left to our own wisdom and strength, we shall soon fall into temptation and into vice; for of this be sure, that there is no virtue firm and lasting, which is not founded on religion, which does not rest on the security of our Father's house. If we abandon Him, He will also abandon us, and we shall be lost; and when we "have spent all," when we have indulged in the vanities, and follies, and sinfulness of our own hearts, and when trials and sorrows come, we, like the poor young man in the parable, shall begin to find, "that we are indeed in want."

Mary. But, Mamma, could none of his friends have helped him, when he was in such distress?

Mrs. B. My dear Mary, the friendship of such companions as he had chosen was not to be depended on; they had shared with him in his follies, and his sins, but they had no real regard for him, no care for his distress. His first, his best, his surest friend, he had himself forsaken; he had gone out into "a far country," from him; and he found, as we also shall find, if *we* desert our best and surest, our heavenly Friend, that of all those things, which we have chosen and loved, there is none which can give us support in difficulties, comfort in sorrow, or assistance in our extremest need.

Henry. Go on, Mamma, if you please. What does it mean by his going out to feed swine?

Mrs. B. I am not aware, my dear, that there is any *peculiar* figurative meaning in this: it is used generally to denote the extreme want in which he now was; that he was obliged to engage in the poorest, and

most degrading occupations, and that even by his labour in these, he was unable to satisfy his necessities, "and no man gave unto him." Here, away from all his natural friends and protectors, he met with no pity, no assistance; those who saw him were strangers, and cared not for him; or they had known the extravagance and folly of his former life, and thought him justly punished for his faults. In this distress, how natural it was that his thoughts should turn homewards! to his father whom he had left, to whom he had behaved so undutifully, but who, he hoped, might still pity and pardon him; that he should long for the comforts and happiness of home, which he had lost by his own misconduct.

Mary. I think, Mamma, it was very well for him, as it turned out, that the famine came, and reduced him to such distress, or perhaps he never would have thought of returning home.

Mrs. B. Indeed it was, my dear girl, and so does God often, in His wonderful dispensations of mercy and providence, make

the very evils and afflictions which our sins have brought upon us the means of turning our hearts again to Him, and making us wish to return to our Father's house. "It is good for me," says David in the Psalms, "that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes."¹ And again in the same Psalm, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept thy word."² Thus does God work good out of evil; good to mankind, even out of the evil they have brought upon themselves. Thus as you observed, Mary, it was indeed good for the prodigal son, that affliction came upon him; and now see what was his conduct. The Scripture says, "And when he *came to himself*." Now, what do you understand by this, Mary?

Mary. I suppose, Mamma, when he came to consider how foolish he had been, and how he had brought all his distress upon himself.

Mrs. B. Yes; he is supposed to have been all this time so blinded by his own

¹ Psalm cxix. 71.

² Psalm cxix. 67

impetuous passions, as to be unable to exercise the sound judgment which God had given him, but which he had perverted; but when the mist fell from his eyes, when all the vanity of his pursuits was apparent to him, when he saw how little they had profited him, *then* he began seriously to "commune with his own heart,"¹—then "he came to himself;" and the first feelings must have been bitter indeed, and bitterly they are expressed. "How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" That kind father, that benevolent master, who will allow none to want who depend on him—him I have left and forsaken: I, the son whom he loved, who might have enjoyed all the abundance and comforts of his house, and all the fulness of his love; I have left and forsaken him, and now "I perish with hunger."

Henry. But, Mamma, I think there was no great merit, if he only repented when he found that he was in such distress, and

¹ Psalm lxxvii. 6.

thought he could make himself more comfortable by going back to his father's house.

Mrs. B. Nor is it supposed, my dear boy, that there is any *merit* in our repentance for our sins, and our returning to our Father, when we have forsaken Him; yet we are assured, that sincere repentance will always be accepted; that He sends our sufferings for the purpose of correcting us, and that when that correction has effected His purpose, of shewing us our own folly and wickedness; of proving to us how much more happy we should have been, if we had never left His protection; He will accept our acknowledgments of our faults, with our determination to forsake them; with our prayers for pardon, and with our return to Him and His house. Still, my dear Henry, there is one circumstance which you have not yet remarked; and that is the *manner* in which the son returns. Had he said, as you seem to think, "I have brought myself to great distress; I was much more comfortable at home; I was very foolish to come away; and I will now go back"—had he argued thus, there would

indeed not only have been no *merit*, but there would have been a great additional sin committed : the son, so returning, would never have been received by his father, as we are told he was. But what *was* his language? When the first bitterness of his remorse and sorrow was over, he began no doubt to think, "I have, indeed, grievously offended my good, my kind father ; I have despised his advice ; I have left his protection ; but, whenever I have before offended him, how kindly he has reproved me ; how much love has he shewn me even in correction : how much regret has he felt for all my faults ! how anxious a desire that I should amend ! Though this, my last fault, is the worst that I have ever committed, I will not despair : I know that I deserve, and that I ought to receive punishment ; but I hope he will inflict it with gentleness : I think he well knows all the feelings of my heart ! he well knows how truly I repent, and desire to amend ; I will, at all events, trust to his love and kindness ; and whatever punishment he may think fit to impose, I will cheerfully submit

to, if he will again receive me to his home. 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.' I am not worthy to be restored to the same place in his family, which I had before I so foolishly, so rashly left it: but in any situation, even in one so low as that of a servant, I shall still be under his protection; I shall still see him; he will still guard me from committing more errors; and, perhaps, after my dutiful conduct has proved to him how truly I repent of my past life, he may take me again to his favour." This, my dear Henry, is the tone in which the repentant feelings of the prodigal are represented, though shortly, in the Bible, and by no means in the way in which it appeared to you. Do you see and understand this?

Henry. Yes, thank you, Mamma; I see very well now, and I am very glad I asked you that question. And now, will you go on, Mamma!

Mrs. B. I think, my dears, as we have a good deal more to say about this parable, we had better put off the reception of the prodigal son by his father and his brother, till to-morrow.

Mary. Oh, Mamma, I am sure we are not the least tired, if you are not.

Mrs. B. I am glad to hear it, my dears ; but our reading has already been longer than usual, and it would take us much too long to finish the parable. To-morrow, therefore, at our usual time, we will, if you like it, begin again.





FIFTH DAY.

Parable of the Prodigal Son

(continued).

“Do you remember, my dear children,” said Mrs. B., “where we left off yesterday?”

Mary. Yes, Mamma, quite well. You had just shewn us, that the prodigal son was really sorry for his fault, and that he came back to his father with real repentance. But, Mamma, Henry and I have been talking about it since yesterday, and we want to

ask you how it was that his father knew that he *was* really sorry ; for, quite at first, before he had said anything, he ran up and kissed him, and forgave him all.

Mrs. B. Your question, my dear Mary, shews that you have thought about what we have been reading, and tried to understand the moral of it ; I will try to explain this part of it to your satisfaction. You will always remember that the father in the parable is the type of (that is, the figure by which to represent) our Father which is in heaven. Recollecting this, we may explain the verse to which you refer in two ways. We know that "there is nothing hid" from *our* Father ; that "there is not a thought in our hearts, but He knoweth it altogether ;" and we may be assured, that He, at least, can well judge of the sincerity and nature of the repentance with which we come again to His house ; and there is no improbability in supposing, that by earthly means the father in the parable had become acquainted with the situation of his wandering son ; that, unknown to him, he had received accounts

of his conduct ; had watched over his errors, and their consequences, and had suffered him to feel those consequences, with a view of recalling him to better thoughts. But though this interpretation is far from impossible, I think I prefer considering him as an earthly father, not to have been acquainted with the whole of his son's conduct, nor with the strong feeling of his repentance. But this, remember, can never be the case with Him, to whom, in the language of our beautiful prayer, "all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid."

Mary. Well, Mamma, then was it not very, very was it not too indulgent, to forgive him as he did at once ?

Mrs. B. His reception of him was kind and indulgent certainly ; but I do not remember the word forgiveness.

Mary. No, Mamma, not the word, but—

Mrs. B. Let us read the expressions. "His father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him." He saw his son, whom he had last seen in health and abundance, and in

comparative innocence too, returning almost naked, sickly with hunger and weariness, and all his evils brought on him by his own sins. He saw his countenance sad and dejected, and his steps feeble ; and he saw that in this state of misery and disgrace, it was still his wish to seek comfort in his father's house. He knew that there, at least, whatever might have been his motive for returning, he would be safe from fresh temptation, and from fresh misery in consequence. Is it wonderful, do you think, my children, that in such a case, all the affection of a father should return, that he should " have compassion " upon any one, much more his own son, in so melancholy a situation, and that, finding it was his own son, he should " run, and fall on his neck, and kiss him," rejoicing that, however guilty, however wretched, he was in his own house again ?

Mary. No, Mamma, I do not think that at all extraordinary. But does it not mean, then, that he quite forgave him ?

Mrs. B. Remember, my dear Mary, in examining and applying the Scriptures, to be

accurate in considering the very expressions: for nothing is so likely to lead to mistakes in *ideas*, as mistakes in *words*, more especially in the Sacred Writings. If, by your word "forgiveness," which you see is *not* in the Bible, you mean that his father felt no angry, no resentful feelings, as soon as he saw his offending son again at home; if you mean that his affection overcame him, and made him shed tears, from joy and compassion mixed, you are right in your ideas; but this by no means implies such *forgiveness* as should prevent him from afterwards employing restraint; and even, if necessary, punishment for past offences. No doubt, if the father had seen that his son returned, not sensible of his guilt; but only because he found, as Henry thought yesterday, that he had brought himself into a state of misery, from which he could relieve himself by returning to the comforts of his father's house; his father might have felt "compassion for him," might even have "fallen on his neck, and kissed him;" but assuredly, he would afterwards have made him feel that

he was not to be restored to the place which he formerly held. He would have dealt correction kindly as a father, but he would have dealt it, to convince his son of his misconduct, and would not again have taken him into favour, till he had found him truly penitent. But again, my loves, remember, that this cannot be the case with a heavenly Father; that He knows, even before the penitent returns to Him, all his thoughts, and wishes, and feelings; that He receives indeed with affection every son that returns to Him; but only such as return to Him "in spirit and in truth:"¹ that is, in sincerity and from the bottom of their hearts. "Let the wicked," says Isaiah, "forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."² But now, Mary, let us go back a moment; for in this meeting between the father and son, we have already passed over one circumstance, from which we may yet draw a point of comparison.

¹ John v. 23.

² Isaiah lv. 7.

Mary. What can that be, Mamma? for I think we have gone over almost every word of the parable.

Mrs. B. Almost, but not quite; and in this parable, perhaps more than any other, we should be careful not to miss a word. You may take my Bible, and read the verse out of it yourself.

Mary. "And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and"—

Mrs. B. I see, my dear girl, that you do not at once catch the idea, which I wished to point out to you; and I am not surprised at it, for it requires close attention, and the habit of reading the parables, to make out their meaning. What do you understand by his father seeing him, "while he was yet a great way off?"

Mary. I did not think particularly about it, Mamma, till you named it. But does it mean that he was waiting for him, and saw him coming.

Mrs. B. Not precisely, my dear, though

our Father may be said indeed to see us when we are coming to Him, and to wait for us with affectionate love. But He does yet more; let us compare the circumstances. The prodigal son has determined indeed upon returning home, he is upon his way; but he is not yet arrived; he is yet “a great way off.” His father, however does not wait till he arrives—he goes out to meet him on his way, to comfort and support him, to lead him back to his own house, whither he is desirous of coming. And so, my love, does God deal with us. When we have offended and sinned against Him, grieving His holy Spirit, and following the devices and desires of our own heart, God looks eagerly for the first symptoms of repentance, for the first step we make towards our home, and towards Him. And when He sees the feeblest attempts at returning, He condescends, “while we are yet a great way off” from Him, to meet us on our way, to have compassion upon us, to support our steps, and to lead us onward to his blessed house.

Henry. Mamma, I do not quite un-

derstand how you mean being far from God.

Mrs. B. Being near to God, and being far from Him, are terms used in Scripture to signify being nearer or farther from the attainment of those dispositions of the heart and mind, which are pleasing to Him; and which never can be obtained but by earnest prayer for His assistance, and by constantly bearing in our minds that He sees and knows all our thoughts, and that we are always in His presence. "An unwise man doth not well consider this; and a fool doth not understand it."¹ An irreligious man accustoms himself not to think of the presence of God, because His presence must be a subject of dread to him. He strives, and for his punishment he strives successfully, to banish God from his thoughts. Such a man is said to be far from God, and God will be far from him. But on the other hand, to the humble penitent, who seeks to return from his evil ways, and to come to God—that merciful God is ever ready to lend an ear. Long

¹ Psalm xcii. 6.

before he attains that disposition of mind which he ought to have, "while he is yet a great way off," God draws nigh to him, and "has compassion on him." What He requires is the earnest wish and endeavour to approach Him; "Draw nigh to God," says St. James, "and He will draw nigh to you."¹ And in the Psalms it is said, "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him: yea, all such as call upon Him in truth."² It is necessary, however, that we should be sincere and earnest in our endeavours; for Isaiah says, "This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but they have removed their heart *far from me*."³ To such as these God holds out no promise that He will draw nigh; on the contrary, He assures us that "He is not mocked,"⁴ and will doubtless receive none but those who really and truly seek Him. And now, Henry, have I made clear to you what is meant by being far from, or near to God?

¹ James iv. 8.² Psalm cxlv. 18.³ Isa. xxix. 13.⁴ Gal. vi. 7.

Henry. Yes, Mamma, and I am very much obliged to you for making me understand it so well. And now shall we go back to the parable?

Mrs. B. With pleasure, my dear, I wish only that you should interrupt me whenever there is any point of the *comparison* (you will remember that is the meaning of a *parable*) which you do not understand, and I will then try to explain it to you; when I am sure that you understand it, I am always ready to go on. To come back then to the parable, I would wish you to observe the conduct of the prodigal son, upon being thus received by his father. His conduct hitherto has been too much a type of what we all *are* with regard to our Heavenly Father: his conduct *here*, is a type and example of what we *should be*. What did he say, Mary?

Mary. Only what he had determined to say before, Mamma.

Mrs. B. Read it, my dear.

Mary. (reading.) "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

Mrs. B. Well, my love, it is very true, that these words are *only* those which he had determined before to use; but is there, do you think, no moral intended to be drawn from the very repetition of them? The words were the same, it is true, but what were the circumstances?

Mary. Oh! I think I see what you mean, Mamma: you mean, that what he promised to do when he was poor and miserable, he did, when he found that his father received him well.

Mrs. B. I do mean that, Mary; and I am glad to see that you can so readily catch the hidden meaning, when you begin to consider: and now for the moral, as applied to ourselves.

Mary. It means, Mamma, does it not, that we should keep our good resolutions? that—but you can explain it so much better than I can Mamma, though I think I understand the sort of meaning.

Mrs. B. I think you have a very good general idea of it; we will see what more we can make of it. The words, you remember,

are precisely the same ; that is, the disposition of the heart remained unchanged : for “ out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”¹ This shews that in the first place his repentance was sincere ; that he did not determine before-hand to adopt this penitent and humble language only as a means of softening the anger of his father ; but from a deep and thorough conviction that it was the language of truth : that he had “ sinned against Heaven ” and against his father, and was “ not worthy to be called his son : ” and that he should be treated better than he deserved, were he even taken into the house as a “ hired servant.” This is the *first* point in which we may take a lesson ; for, as we all have sinned, we all have need of deep repentance ; and repentance, unless sincere, will be of no avail with an all-seeing Judge. But the *second* point which I wish to notice to you (and I do not expect you to find out these more distant meanings without having them noticed) is this, that we must not presume

¹ Matt. xii. 34.

upon the grace and long-suffering of God. It is true, that upon our first steps towards repentance and amendment of life, our Heavenly Father, "while we are yet a great way off," will "have compassion on us," and come to meet and aid us; and of this we are assured by many texts of Scripture; but we on our parts should bear in mind the conduct of the prodigal son; we should not suffer the indulgence of our Father to take away from us the sense of our error; we should be as ready to exclaim, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son," even after we believe our repentance to be accepted, as we were in the first feelings of remorse and sorrow. Though *He* forgets our sins, *we* never should. Nay, the greater are His mercies towards us, the more we should feel our own unworthiness of them; the more willing should we be, if He demanded it, to prove our sincerity, by serving Him in the lowest offices, as "hired servants." Can you understand this, my dears?

Mary. Yes, Mamma; and I see now why these words should be repeated again, which I am sure I never should have thought of.

Mrs. B. Then, my love, observe again the conduct of the father. *Before*, he saw his son returned, with whatever degree of repentance in his heart, at least determined, to place himself under the care of his father for the future: he saw his wretched situation and sufferings; and, with the affection of a father, "he had compassion on him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him:" but *now*, when his humble expressions, and true contrition, proved that he was truly penitent for his past conduct, all is *now forgiven*, Mary. There are no reproaches, no punishment, no anger; the sinner's conscience reproaches him sufficiently, and no kindness on his father's part can make him forget his own unworthiness. *Now*, then, the father feels that he is at liberty to say, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and be merry—for," he adds, "this my

son was dead, and is alive again: he was lost, and is found." The first part of this, you will understand, is in allusion to the eastern customs of washing the feet of strangers and furnishing them with clothes, and any thing of which they might stand in need, on their arriving after a journey; and must be taken as meaning, generally, making the son welcome to all that the house afforded, treating him as a distinguished guest, and making a feast and a rejoicing to receive him. But what we have to attend to is, the *reason* given: "For this my son was dead, and is alive again: he was lost and is found." Now, it is quite clear that this was not spoken in a literal sense, as having been dead, or having been lost.

Henry. But he had been lost, Mamma, though he had not been dead.

Mrs. B. Yes, my dear, he had been lost; but it was not upon his being literally found again, that these expressions were used. The proof that he was indeed found in the better sense, that he was really alive again, was the humility of his repentance, and his

sorrow for his past life. It was not till after this, that his father declared him to be found; to be alive; and in this way the Scriptures frequently use both these expressions. "I am not sent," says our Saviour, "but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."¹ "God," says St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, "who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us" (that is made us alive), "together with Christ."² And this is the sense in which we must take the parable, when we apply it to ourselves. It is over such a finding as this, over such a rising "from the death of sin unto a life of righteousness," that there is "joy in heaven:" when we return unto our Father's house forsake a course of life, which must have led us in a few years to an everlasting death; and resolve "to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in His holy ways;"³ then, my

¹ Matt. xv. 24.

² Ephes. ii. 4, 5.

³ Communion Service.

children we may be sure that our God, who is our Father, will receive us into His house, not as servants, but as children : and, as St. Paul argues, "if children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ ;"¹ heirs of that glorious and eternal kingdom, which He died to procure for us ! Oh ! my dear children, from that Father's house may we study never to depart ; but if we do, may the parable we have been reading teach us how to approach Him again, well assured that those who do so approach Him, He will not reject !

Mary. Indeed, Mamma, we will both pray to the good God, never to let us leave His house all our lives.

Mrs. B. I trust you will, my loves ; and while you do so, depend upon it, depend upon His promises, that He will hear and grant your prayers. But we have one part yet to consider of the parable—the conduct of the elder brother, who roused Henry's indignation so much.

Henry. Well, Mamma, but was it not very

¹ Rom. viii. 17.

shameful to be angry, because his brother was come home, and his father had received him kindly ?

Mrs. B. It is, indeed melancholy to think, my love, that there should be persons to whom the happiness of another, the goodness and bounty of God, should cause pain and grief. The vice of Envy is indeed its own punishment ; it is a perpetual torment to the unhappy person who is subject to it, making his misery out of all which might add to his happiness. But while such a vice is to be found, as I fear it will be in all ages, it was necessary for our Saviour to warn His disciples and followers against it ; and He could not perhaps have put it in a light to shew more strongly its odious nature, than by representing one brother as envious of the kindness shewn to another by their common father.

Mary. But I should think, Mamma, that was a case which could never happen.

Mrs. B. I fear it may, my dear little girl, too often, even in the literal sense. But you must remember, that in the parable, God,

the common Father of all men, is intended by the father; and we and all mankind are brethren. In this sense, how often are we guilty of the very sin which we so severely condemn in the elder brother! As often as we feel inclined to repine at our own situation, to wish that God had given us some advantage, some convenience which we see enjoyed by others, so often, to a certain degree, are we guilty of this sin; though it does not put on its worst form, unless we feel inclined to repine, not only that *we* have *not*, but that *another has*, that which we desire. Then we are guilty of the same sin as the son in the parable: then we in fact complain, "Thou never gavest *me* a *kid*, that I might make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son is come, thou hast killed for *him* the *fatted calf*!" But I ought to remind you, that this parable was spoken particularly to the Jews, a nation who had for many ages considered themselves as God's peculiar people, and who despised all other nations, and avoided any communication with them.

Henry. But they had been God's people, had they not?

Mrs. B. Yes, my dear; and for that reason they are alluded to in the parable as the elder son. From this time, however, all nations were to be placed upon an equality; the Gentiles (that is, all the rest of the world) were to be brothers to the Jews, and to partake of the mercy of the same Father; and it was at once to shew them this, and to reprove them for their pride and contempt of the Gentiles, that our Saviour probably introduced the last part of the parable; though we may also well take it to ourselves as a moral lesson. I hope, however, my loves, that I need not warn you against so detestable a vice as this of envy. I will, therefore, rather make you remark, before we quit this parable, the kind and gentle reproof which the father gives to his son. He does not upbraid him with the greatness of his sin; he leaves him to consider it on cooler reflection, and he contents himself with shewing him how unreasonable was his dissatisfaction, and how great the blessings

which he himself enjoyed. "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." And so says our Father to those who truly and faithfully serve Him, who remain ever in His house: all His mercy, all His comforts, all His love, are ever with them. "He dwelleth in them, and they in him."¹ Even here His Spirit is ever with them, and hereafter they shall dwell with Him for ever. But he says to them also, Despise not those who appear less good, less religious than yourselves: above all, rejoice in every amendment that you see in them; rejoice when these your "younger brothers" come back to their Father's home, sensible of their folly, and seeking again His protection. And believe me, my children, that when we so rejoice in the amendment of others; above all, when we contribute to it, if we can, we are doing that which God Himself declares "it is meet" that we should do: that, when we ourselves repent and turn again to God, we give joy to the angels that are in heaven: and when we lead a brother to God and to

¹ 1 John iv. 16.

holiness, those blessed angels themselves rejoice with us, saying, that "this our brother was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And now, my loves, may this parable, and all other portions of the Holy Word of God, sink into your hearts, and there bring forth their blessed fruit in God's good season! May He be with us, and teach us, and guide us to His house of everlasting happiness!

Mary. Thank you, dear Mamma! I am quite sorry we have finished this parable, for I have liked it very much.

Henry. And so have I, Mamma. I hope you have got some more for us.

Mrs. B. Oh! yes, my loves, I have several more which I can read you; and I am glad to see that you are not tired, and that you seem to understand so much of what I read. I will select another parable for you by to-morrow.



SIXTH DAY.

Parable of the Two Servants.

MATTHEW XVIII. 23.

“You will have seen, my dears,” said Mrs. B., when her children came the following day, with the request that she would read them another parable, “that those which we have hitherto read, relate almost exclusively to our duty towards God. That which I have taken for this evening’s reading, prescribes to us one principal part of our duty to our neighbour.”

Mary. Did you not tell me the other day, Mamma, that doing our duty to our neighbours was a part of our duty to God?

Mrs. B. I did, my dear Mary; for *all* duty is duty to God, inasmuch as it is in obedience to His commands; and as the motive of *all* our actions ought to be love for Him, and a desire to please Him. But by our duty to God, in an especial manner, is meant what is called by Jesus Christ "the first and great commandment,"¹ and in the words of our Church Catechism, "to believe in him, to fear him, and to love him with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength: to worship him, to give him thanks, to put our whole trust in him, to call upon him, to honour his holy name and his word; and to serve him truly all the days of our lives." I ought perhaps rather to have told you, that the parables which we have hitherto read, treat more particularly of the conduct of God towards man, in the government of the world,

¹ Matt. xxii. 38.

and of the sentiments towards Him with which His conduct should inspire us. That which I am now going to read, relates more immediately to the conduct which we ought to adopt one towards another—to the duty of man to man. For instance, to take our last parable, upon which we spent so much time, tell me, Mary, what were the great truths which it was intended to impress upon us ?

Mary. The father, Mamma, was meant to represent God, and the parable was to shew the goodness of God in forgiving all our faults, and the way in which we ought to be sorry for them, and to ask for His forgiveness.

Mrs. B. We shall now begin to follow this up, that is, to reason upon it, and to form a conclusion from it. From the conduct of *God to us*, we must learn what ought to be the conduct of *man to man*.

Henry. But, Mamma, how can we put man into the place of God ? How can we compare the two cases ?

Mrs. B. God Himself, my dear Henry, has

been pleased to compare them for our instruction, and teaches us, that if He who is all-perfect is kind and forgiving to us, much more should we, imperfect as we are, show a similar indulgence, and similar kindness, towards those who stand in need of our forgiveness. And this is the first branch of our duty to our neighbour, or, in other words, of charity.

Henry. I thought, Mamma, that charity meant giving money, and clothes, and food to poor people, who could not buy them for themselves.

Mrs. B. That, my dear Henry, is indeed one branch of charity ; but it is a very small portion of the Christian virtue of charity. When you are older, and more able to understand the whole meaning of this first of virtues, you will find, in one of St. Paul's Epistles, a full enumeration of all its good qualities : but it is quite sufficient for our purpose to take these two plain instructions—the one, “ As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise ; ”¹ and

¹ Luke vi. 31.

the other, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." "This," says Jesus, after naming, as I told you before, the first and great commandment, "is the second, and like unto it."¹ "Love," says St. Paul, "is the fulfilling of the law:"² and, in short, the substance of the Christian Religion, in other words, our duty to God, and our duty to man, consists of love to God, and love to man. If we act towards God as if we loved Him, we shall obey Him, we shall serve Him, we shall be anxious to please Him. If we act towards men as if we loved them, we shall be kind, indulgent, forgiving, obliging, careful not to offend, and not to be offended: in a word, (for we cannot go farther,) to do to all men as we would wish that they should do to us.

Mary. I think, Mamma, that rule is so plain that it cannot be very difficult, because we all know what we should wish that people should do to us; but I do not see how we can love our neighbour as ourselves.

Mrs. B. The two expressions, my dear

¹ Matt. xxii. 38, 39.

² Rom. xiii. 10.

girl, come nearly to the same meaning ; and though you think the rule so plain that it cannot be difficult, I am afraid that you will find that there is no one person who acts really and completely up to it. It is very true, as you say, that we all know what we should wish that others should do to us, if we give ourselves time honestly to consider ; but such is the perverseness of our natural dispositions, without God's assistance, that we are too apt to indulge our selfish feelings, to judge of our neighbour's actions in a very different manner from that in which we judge of our own ; to follow our favourite pursuits, without thinking how they may affect others ; or even if we do consider, to prefer our own immediate advantage or gratification, notwithstanding the injury or inconvenience which we may thus cause to them. All petulance, ill-humour, disobligingness, all hasty language of, or to, a person ; all tale-bearing, scandal, ill-natured ridicule ; not to mention, of course, the heavier offences of theft, fraud, violence, envy : all these are breaches of the great law of doing to all men

as we would they should do unto us; and I think you will see now that it requires constant watchfulness over ourselves, to enable us to perform this duty even very imperfectly.

Mary. Yes, Mamma, I see it is not so easy as I fancied; because I had not thought of all those little things; but still it seems much easier to do to others as we would wish them to do to us, than to love all our neighbours as ourselves. I can love you, Mamma, and Papa, and my brother very, very much; but how can we love people that we know nothing about?

Mrs. B. Your difficulty arises from not understanding the meaning of the expression. It *is* impossible you should feel for persons whom you do not know, and have nothing to do with, the same natural affection which you feel for your relations and friends; perhaps even them you can hardly love as well as you do yourself: strangers, you certainly cannot; but the love of our neighbour, spoken of in the Bible, means a general and earnest desire to assist and

oblige, and to do good to all men. If we love a person very much, we are naturally anxious to please him, to assist him in difficulties, to comfort him in sorrows, to rejoice in his joys, to do anything that he wishes, to avoid all that he dislikes: and this, so far as is consistent with our higher duty to God, we should endeavour to do, where it lies in our power, to all men. This is true Christian love, which we are enjoined to exercise towards all; pure, kind, peaceable, obliging, forbearing, forgiving, active, unceasing: and though the degree in which we are to exercise it is high, "loving others as ourselves," it is no more than "doing to others as we would they should do unto us;" placing ourselves in the situation of others before we act, and considering whether, if we loved our neighbour as we love ourselves, we should act so and so. This is the great Christian doctrine, "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another,"¹ and to let our conduct towards all men prove what are our feelings, and our principles.

¹ 1 John iv. 11.

Mary. Thank you, Mamma, I see now what it means, and that it is not so very easy. I did not understand it before. And, now, Mamma, may we come to our parable?

Mrs. B. Yes, my love, as soon as you please. You will find the application of it very easy, particularly after what we have been saying; but it does not the less deserve our attention on account of its plainness.

“The kingdom of heaven,” says our Saviour, “is likened unto a certain king.”

Mary. I beg your pardon, Mamma, but how is the *kingdom* of heaven likened to a *king*?

Mrs. B. I am glad you have asked the question, my dear Mary. It is a common beginning of the parables; “The kingdom of heaven is like:” and it does not always mean, as it does not in this instance, that the kingdom of heaven, in our common acceptance of the expression, is like this or that; but in allusion to something which has gone before. Jesus introduces a parable to illustrate “the dealings of God towards mankind,

with reference to their ultimate salvation ;” and I think wherever the expression is used, you may take this as the explanation of it. In this sense it is not to be understood to be compared to the subject to which it is immediately said to be like ; but you may transpose the whole sense in this way. Instead of “the kingdom of heaven is like,” &c., suppose the words, “the dealings of God towards mankind with reference to their ultimate salvation,” are such as are represented in the following story. You are then left to compare the persons and things one with another, as you find them to apply. In this way you must take the present parable.

“The kingdom of heaven,” then, “is likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought in unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.”

Henry. How much was a talent, Mamma?

Mrs. B. A talent of silver, my love, was equal to £187. 10s. of our money ; that is, the servant’s debt was equal to £1,875,000

sterling. But it is sufficient for our purpose to know, that it amounted to a sum which the servant neither had nor was likely to have the power of paying. The parable goes on, "But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made."

Henry. But, Mamma, how could he order the man to be sold? or his wife? or his children? or who would buy them?

Mrs. B. My love, we ought to be very thankful, that in our country slavery is unknown; that we cannot any of us be bought and sold as slaves, at the pleasure of any master. But at the time in which our Saviour lived the practice of slavery was universal: and even now there are countries where men and women are bought and sold like horses or cattle; and where, if one person owes a debt to another, he will frequently sell one of his servants in order to pay it. In reading the Bible, we ought always to remember this, and to recollect, that the word servant often means, not as with us, a person

who stays in our service as long as he pleases, and receives wages while he stays; but a person whom his master has bought, and with whom he may do what he pleases, without being called to account. And such in effect is our dependence upon Almighty God. We are His, not by our own voluntary service for money; but by His creation and preservation of us for His own good purposes. Without Him, we should not have been at all; but, still more, without Him, we should, after this life, have no hope of being received into life everlasting. He has indeed bought us with a price; and that price was the blood of His Son, our Saviour and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. To Him, were it for this only, we owe far more than we can ever hope to pay; but, considering how every day, almost every hour, we do something to displease Him, something to increase the enormous debt which we already owe, what should we do, were He to demand his strict rights? to come to account with us, His "servants," and to command that "payment should be made?"

Mary. We could do nothing, Mamma, but beg Him to forgive us, and to assist us to do better for the future.

Mrs. B. And this, my love, is all that our merciful Master requires of us to do. "The servant," says Jesus, "therefore fell down, and worshipped him," (that is, earnestly entreated him,) "saying, Lord have patience with me, and I will pay thee all."

Henry. But he never could have paid him all that money, Mamma, so he was only making a sham promise.

Mrs. B. It is true, my dear Henry, it was not likely that he ever should pay him any considerable part of the debt. But his lord kindly considered, that the servant was willing to do all that he could; that he was sensible he was at his master's mercy; that he had nothing else to rely on; and that, so far as he could, he was determined to devote all his future earnings to paying off this one debt. But what does God do? What did the lord do? "Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt."

Henry. What, Mamma! let him off the whole of the million, and I don't know how many thousand pounds, and let him go on just as if he had owed nothing at all?

Mrs. B. So says the parable.

Henry. But how very generous that was, Mamma! Do not you think so?

Mrs. B. It was, certainly, my love, an act of generosity which the servant could never repay; for which the services of all his future life, and those of all his family, would not have been a sufficient recompense, even if he had been under no former obligation to serve his master. It saved him from being sold, perhaps to a harsh and cruel master, separated from wife and children, and tormented by the thought that his misconduct had brought upon them the same hard fate as upon himself. And yet, my loves, this, or worse than this, cannot be compared to the torments to come, from which the mercy of God alone can save, and will save, those who ask Him.

Mary. I don't think, Mamma, I have very clear notions of everlasting punishment.

Mrs. B. We can none of us, my love, have in our present world clear notions of the awful secrets which shall be revealed. God, in mercy to us, has hidden from our eyes the knowledge of the precise nature of the future sufferings of the wicked; yet He has told enough to make us shrink from the idea with awe and horror. Shut out from the presence of God, in outer darkness, amidst weeping and gnashing of teeth, in everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and wicked and rebellious spirits, where "the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched;" these are some of the expressions used concerning this awful subject in Scripture.

Mary. Oh! Mamma, how very, very dreadful!

Mrs. B. Dreadful indeed, my love! What earthly debt, what suffering for a few years here, can be compared with this? What was the punishment which the servant had incurred compared to that from which the mercy of God delivers us?

Henry. Oh! but Mamma, this is only for very, very wicked people, is it?

Mrs. B. This, my love, is the punishment threatened to all wilful sin, all disobedience to God's commands; and one should think, that such a punishment denounced, would of itself prevent us from sinning; and yet, as David says, "Who can tell how oft he offendeth?"¹ Every day, every hour almost, we offend our God in word, in thought, or in deed. But He knoweth our infirmities, and instead of exacting the strict punishment of all our sins, He accepts the atonement of His own Son, who died to save us; and, through Him, our sincere repentance and prayer for forgiveness.

Henry. But, if we sin again and again, will He forgive us every time?

Mrs. B. Yes, my love, every time, if we truly repent and are sorry, and endeavour to amend. His mercies "fail not!" but are "new every morning."² He does not expect us to say, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all;" for He knows that we are unable to do so. He requires us only to say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and

¹ Psalm xix. 12.

² Lam. iii. 22, 23.

in thy sight;" and He in mercy will ever answer, "Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace."¹ And what, my loves, should be our return to God for such inestimable mercy? Should we not love Him, praise Him, be grateful to Him, and endeavour to serve Him, and obey His commandments better? Should we not endeavour to repay, at least, a small part of what we owe?

Mary. But how can we repay any thing, Mamma?

Mrs. B. God, indeed, my love, does not stand in need of our service; still less of our forgiveness. But now comes the great Christian doctrine. God requires, in return for His forgiveness of us, our forgiveness of each other. Christ teaches us to pray to God, "to forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." "For," says He, "if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."² We will examine this great truth

¹ Luke vii. 48—50.

² Matt. vi. 12—15.

with the parable. Immediately after the servant left his forgiving master, "he went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not, but went, and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt."

Henry. Oh! what a shame, Mamma! When he had just been excused so much himself, to be so cruel! He ought to have been so glad and so happy, that he would not have cared whether he was paid or not.

Mrs. B. He ought to have been so *gratefully* happy, as, in remembrance of the goodness of his master towards him, to have felt rejoiced at having an opportunity of showing the same to his fellow-servant.

Mary. And so little as he owed him too, Mamma! only "an hundred pence," when

he had been excused so many thousand pounds!

Mrs. B. It was certainly quite inexcusable, my love, and I am glad you see it in its proper light. So it appeared also to his fellow-servants. "For," says the parable, "when they saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done." Now, without throwing any blame upon the other servants, whose conduct was very natural, we may draw this lesson, at least, from this part of the parable; that while the servant himself acted in this cruel and hard-hearted manner, all his fellow-servants were ready to see how wicked his conduct was. The injustice of another struck them forcibly; had it been their own, would it have done so equally? Are we not all more sensible of the faults of others than of our own? Are we not more ready to condemn them, than ourselves? Against this fault we should pray, and exert ourselves, and endeavour to consider strictly our own offences, and more indulgently those of others.

Mary. But, Mamma, this *was* very wicked in the servant: and were not the other servants right to tell their master?

Mrs. B. It certainly *was* very wicked, my dear Mary, and I do not say that the servants might not have acted from a strong sense of justice. I only wish to impress upon your minds, that we should be equally just, and not more indulgent, to our own sins; but tell them to our great Master as readily, nay more so, than we would those of others. But, as you said before, the servant's conduct was very wicked; for the debt to him bore no comparison to that which he had been forgiven. Yet he would listen to no excuse. His fellow-servant, by constant industry, might easily have repaid his debt. If his creditor had had patience with him, he might have paid him all; but the servant, who was in debt to his master, had no such hope. The request was put in both cases in the same words; in the first, it could not have been fulfilled; in the second it might: yet in the first, it was accepted; in the second, it was harshly and cruelly refused.

Henry. Yes, Mamma, and I should hope the master punished him well: I should not care what happened to him.

Mrs. B. Take care, my dear Henry, what you say. Your opinion of his conduct may be quite right; but beware of being too hasty, or too severe in your judgment. But you shall hear what the master himself says. "Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due unto him."

Henry. Well, Mamma, and he was quite right; that is just what he should have done.

Mrs. B. He was no doubt quite right, my love, for it was God who did it; and, according to all our notions, His justice was as conspicuous as the conduct of the servant was unpardonable. But what a lesson does

it give to us ! Whose offences against us can be compared with our offences against God ? If we receive an injury, or what we call a just cause for anger, from any one, we think we may fairly indulge our resentment ; and were God to deal so with us, oh ! what would become of us ? Immediately before this parable was delivered, Peter, one of the Apostles, who, like the rest, was a Jew, and interpreted every commandment of God according to the letter, came to Jesus and said, " Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him ? until seven times ? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times : but, until seventy times seven " ¹ (that is to say, to an indefinite number of times). He then relates this parable.

Mary. Then, Mamma, are we to forgive the same people over and over, and over again ?

Mrs. B. Does not God, my love, forgive *us* over and over, and over again ? and to an infinitely greater extent than we can ever

¹ Matt. xviii. 21, 22.

have it in our power to forgive others? And would not our own consciences condemn us, did we not forgive to the uttermost? We noticed, just now, the command given us by our Saviour to pray that our Heavenly Father will forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And can we expect that we shall be forgiven the "ten thousand talents" which we owe to God, if we refuse to forgive the "hundred pence" which our poor fellow-creatures may happen to owe us? But we are not left to conjecture for ourselves upon this subject, for Jesus Himself closes His parable with these words: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother his trespasses." Consider too, my dear children, what are the "tormentors" to whom *we* shall be delivered, were God to insist on any part of His payment; consider how unspeakable is the difference between what we owe Him, and what any of us owe to each other; and we shall feel how grateful we ought to be for forgiveness upon such easy conditions.

Henry. But are we quite sure, Mamma, that God will forgive us, if we forgive others?

Mrs. B. Yes, my love, we have His word, which never faileth, to assure us that He will, if we from our hearts forgive each other. Nothing can be plainer than His declaration on this point: "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: *forgive, and ye shall be forgiven*: for with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again."¹

This, my love, is one of the great branches of Christian charity—mutual forgiveness, as God for Jesus Christ's sake forgives us. Several of the others are alluded to and recommended by other parables, with which we will go on another day. For the present we have had enough. Indeed, I think our readings grow longer and longer every day.

Mary. I am sure, Mamma, I like them better and better every day. I hope you have a great many more parables ready.

¹ Luke vi. 36—38.

Henry. And, Mamma, what is the name of the one for to-morrow? and what is it about?

Mrs. B. To-morrow, my dear Henry, we shall take a branch of charity more nearly approaching to your first notion. The parable is called "The Good Samaritan."

Henry. Well, Mamma, and what is it about?

Mrs. B. No, no, Mr. Henry, I must not be cheated into beginning to-day; you must have patience till to-morrow, if you please, before you hear about the good Samaritan.





SEVENTH DAY.

Parable of the Good Samaritan.

LUKE x. 29

“THOU shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” said Mrs. B., “was, you remember, the second great commandment; second only to that of “loving God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind;”¹ and I think you have not forgotten what I told you was meant by this love of our neighbour.

¹ Luke x. 27.

Mary. No, Mamma; you told us that it was the same as Christian charity, and that one part of charity was to forgive one another; and that you would tell us another part of it to-day, in the story of the good Samaritan.

Mrs. B. Very well, Mary.—Our Saviour, then, was in conversation with a Jewish lawyer upon this subject. Now the lawyer probably thought that he fulfilled this law when he behaved kindly to those who were literally his neighbours; his friends or relations, or *near neighbours*, as we call them. Being willing, therefore, as we are here told, to *justify himself*, that is, to prove that he had done his duty, he said unto Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

Jesus made him no immediate answer, but began a parable, at the end of which the lawyer might be able to answer his question himself.

“A certain man,” said He, “went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him

half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way ; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side."

Henry. What ! without helping him, or doing anything for him, when he saw him lying on the road half dead ?

Mary. And a priest too, Mamma ! does not that make it worse ?

Mrs. B. It makes his conduct certainly less excusable, because, being one of those who served God in the temple, he ought to have known that God " will have mercy and not sacrifice ;"¹ that is, that God prefers the fulfilment of the great law of human kindness, to the most punctual obedience paid to the ritual law of Moses.

Henry. What do you mean by the ritual law of Moses, Mamma ?

Mrs. B. It is too long a question for us to enter into fully at this time ; when you are older, it will be well worth your studying at large. But, in a few words, I will try to give you a general idea of it, though it will rather interrupt the progress of our parables.

¹ Matt. ix. 13.

When God had singled out Abraham from all the earth, to be the father of a great nation, which should preserve the worship of the true God, He appointed certain forms and ceremonies, which should represent and be types of spiritual blessings afterwards to be bestowed. For example, the sacrifice of Isaac, the proof of Abraham's faith, was a type, or representation, of the sacrifice of God's own Son, which in time was to take place as an atonement for the sins of all the world. Peculiar rites were then and afterwards, especially under Moses, ordained, which for the time served to keep the Jews a distinct people from all the nations of the earth, but which also represented heavenly and spiritual blessings, which should in times to come be revealed, not only to the Jews, but to all the world. The most minute directions were given by God Himself for the service of the temple, and the observance of certain feasts, most, if not all of which, though apparently insignificant, were, I doubt not, intended to represent some spiritual object, and thus serve as a perpetual

memorial of God's everlasting providence. The observance of these ceremonies, or rites, constituted what is called the ritual law of Moses ; and as Moses himself, the great law-giver of the Old Testament, was the type of our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, the great Lawgiver of the New, so the ritual law and the ceremonies of the first religion, were intended as types of the moral and spiritual law, introduced by the New Testament, the Christian dispensation. I do not know whether you will understand me, when I say that, in some degree, the old religion was a perpetual parable ; a succession of visible and outward objects, which all had some farther meaning, and were at last explained when Jesus Christ came into the world to fulfil, as He declared, the law and the prophets.

Mary. I don't think I do quite understand this, Mamma.

Mrs. B. Perhaps an example will make it more clear. We have already mentioned the sacrifice of Isaac, as a type or representation of the sacrifice of the Son of God. You understand this ?

Mary. Yes, Mamma.

Mrs. B. You remember, also, that when the children of Israel were taken under God's especial protection, "out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage,"¹ they were commanded, in celebration of God's mercy to them in passing over their houses when he slew the first-born of the Egyptians, to kill a lamb every year on a particular day, and to keep the feast of the Passover.

Mary. Yes, Mamma, but this was to celebrate something which was past.

Mrs. B. Not altogether, my dear, nor even chiefly. It was to be a type of something which was to come; it was to prefigure, or represent beforehand, the slaying of Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God," who is called "Our Passover;" and the mercy of God upon those for whom His blood was shed, and who thankfully acknowledge and receive it. It was for this reason, that this and several other observances commanded by Moses, were kept up, to prefigure that which was of

¹ Exod. xx. 2.

more importance, the final accomplishment of their heavenly meaning; and when you are able to study and understand this part of the Old Testament, you will be astonished at the wonderful number of these types, and their close resemblance to their final objects.

Mary. Can you tell us any more of these types, Mamma?

Mrs. B. I could tell you many more, my love, but it would take us too far away from our present subject. What I want you to understand is, that the law, as prescribed by Moses, was only, as St. Paul says, "a shadow of good things to come;"¹ and that things commanded in it, seemingly quite indifferent, were really of consequence, as representing others of a spiritual nature.

Mary. Yes, Mamma, I understand that now a little better than I did. But did not the Jews understand all this too?

Mrs. B. No, my love, the Jews were in general proud of being the chosen people of God; not reflecting that they were only His

¹ Heb. x. 1.

instruments for keeping alive His religion, and for proving the equity of His providential dispensations; they imagined that they alone possessed the favour of God; and that His service consisted chiefly in an observance of (what I think you now understand) the ritual law of Moses: they avoided all intercourse with other nations, and thought that even by doing acts of kindness to them, they should pollute their own holiness, as the peculiar people of the God of Israel.

Mary. And was this the reason, Mamma, why the priest went by, and took no notice of the poor man, who was lying wounded in the road?

Mrs. B. No, my love, he had not even this excuse, for in all probability the man was himself a Jew, to whom this misfortune happened. He perhaps thought that the man was already dead, in which case it would have defiled him to have touched him; that is to say, it would have been necessary for him, according to the law of Moses, to have performed certain ceremonies of purification, before he could again

have attended on the service of the temple ; or perhaps he was bent on business, and it would have been inconvenient to him to be detained ; so that instead of “ doing to ” this poor wounded man, “ as he would have wished to have been done by,” had he been in such a state, he contented himself with passing by on the other side.

Henry. What does it mean, Mamma, by passing by on the other side.

Mrs. B. It probably means, that he would not go close past him, but went at some distance, pretending not to see him ; thus adding to the sin of inhumanity that of hypocrisy ; but though, had any other persons been near, they might have been so far deceived as to suppose that he really did not see him, God saw the cruelty and the hypocrisy of the whole proceeding, for “ He knoweth the very secrets of the heart,”¹ and doubtless, such conduct would not escape His anger ; for, “ thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward ” (and equally punish) “ thee openly.”²

¹ Psalm xliv. 21.

² Matt. vi. 6.

Henry. And was this poor man left then in the road to die ?

Mrs. B. The next that came that way was not a priest, but he was a Levite ; one of that peculiar tribe, from among whom the priests were taken, and who were all especially dedicated to the service of God. " And likewise the Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side."

Henry. What ! the Levite too, Mamma ! and looked at him, and saw how much he was hurt !

Mrs. B. Yes, my dear boy, it is a melancholy instance of inattention, and want of feeling for the sufferings of others which cannot be excused ; but more especially among those who have been better taught and instructed, as the Priest and the Levite had been ; or rather as they would have been, but for the literal interpretation which they put upon their law, and their attention rather to outward things, than the inward law of the heart. But let us return to the poor wounded man. " A certain Samaritan," says

the parable, "as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine; and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee."

Henry. Two pence, Mamma! that was not a great deal of money to leave with him!

Mrs. B. The Roman penny, my love, was a much larger sum than ours, and as the value of money was different then from what it is now, we must not judge of the amount left with the inn-keeper, from what it sounds to us. Perhaps, also, he might not be able at the time to spare much money; but it is clear that there was no want of generosity, by his parting request, "Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee." But is there no-

thing more in this story than the amount of the money given ?

Henry. Oh, yes, Mamma, it was very kind of the Samaritan to take such care of the poor man, and attend to him : but only two pence sounded so odd, I could not help saying so.

Mrs. B. It would have been very kind in any one, under any circumstances : but let us look to those of this case, and see if there was anything remarkable in them. In the first place, he was a Samaritan.

Henry. Who were the Samaritans, Mamma ?

Mrs. B. They were the inhabitants of Samaria, whose origin was partly Jewish and partly heathen ; who worshipped the true God, and acknowledged the authority of Moses, but who did not conform to the rites and ceremonies of the Jews, nor come up to worship at Jerusalem. For these reasons the Jews hated them more than nations altogether heathen. " They had no dealings with the Samaritans."¹ When they wished

¹ John iv. 9.

to reproach our Saviour bitterly, they told him, "He was a Samaritan, and had a devil;"¹ and they considered it an abomination even to speak to one of them. The Samaritan, therefore, if he had been disposed to return evil for evil, might have rejoiced in seeing one of his enemies in so wretched a state; at all events, he might have acted upon the Jewish maxim, of "Love your friends and hate your enemies." He might have "passed by on the other side," and left him to die, as his own countrymen, the Priest and the Levite had done. But this good Samaritan was worthy of being a Christian; for he held, and acted upon the principle of "loving his enemies, and doing good to those that hated him."² He had compassion on him, and seeing his distress, did all he could to relieve it.

Mary. And had the poor wounded man hated the Samaritans before, Mamma?

Mrs. B. No doubt he had despised and avoided them, in compliance with the common habits of his nation.

¹ John viii. 48.

² Matt. v. 44.

Mary. How ashamed he must have been afterwards, when he found who it was that had assisted him, and how his own countrymen had left him to die !

Mrs. B. We should hope he was, my love, and more than ashamed ; that through God's grace he was able to conquer his unworthy prejudices, and be more ready to receive the great truth, afterwards preached by the Apostles, that " God is no respecter of persons ; but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."¹

But see if there is any other particular circumstance in the conduct of this Samaritan. This happened " as he journeyed ;" he was really upon business ; we see he could not stay above one night at the inn ; he might have pleaded, that to stop and assist this poor wounded Jew would put him to great inconvenience ; that the Jew was in his own country, among his immediate " neighbours," who would, doubtless, take care of him ; while he himself was not only

¹ Acts x. 34, 35.

in a strange country, without friends or means of doing good, but among those who scorned and hated both him and his nation. But of all this he thought not; he thought not of what a Jew, under such circumstances, *would have done* to him, but of what *he should have wished him to do*, and he acted accordingly. And "verily he had his reward" in the sight of God, if not of man.

Mary. Mamma, you make me quite love this good Samaritan.

Mrs. B. I would wish you to love his character, so as to imitate it where you have the power. But we will just finish the story, for you will remember, that it was told by Jesus Christ to a Jewish lawyer.

Henry. I should like to know what he had to say for the Jews.

Mrs. B. Jesus continued: "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him."

Henry. Come, I am glad he owned that at least.

Mrs. B. "Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."

And now, my loves, what does Jesus say to us? How are we to read and profit by this His Holy Word? Tell me, my dear Mary, what are the great lessons which we are to learn in this branch of Christian charity?

Mary. That we are to consider all men as our neighbours, Mamma, and do good to them whenever we can.

Mrs. B. Very well. What next?

Mary. I do not know, Mamma, unless that we are not to mind whether they are our enemies or not.

Mrs. B. Right again; that is, we are not to consider whether they have injured or wronged us (for a Christian should have no enemies), whether they are likely to be ungrateful or grateful, whether they will ever have the means of returning our kindness, or will return it with injury and insult: for we look for our exceeding "great reward"¹ from our Father in heaven. But still more,

¹ Gen. xv. 1.

the Samaritan did this great kindness, at a time particularly inconvenient to himself: is there no lesson to be learnt from this?

Mary. Yes, Mamma; that we should not only do good, when it gives us no trouble, but even when it is very disagreeable to us.

Mrs. B. Disagreeable is not a word to be applied to doing good. But we are taught to do good to all men, at all times, under all circumstances, even where it may require a sacrifice of our own wishes, inclinations, or time, or anything else which we should have liked to have disposed of otherwise. One more lesson I will point out to you, from the conduct of the Priest. He passed on the other side, pretending not to see the wounded man. Do you understand anything which may be drawn from this?

Mary. I do not think I do very particularly.

Mrs. B. Does it not imply this, that God will not excuse us if we look carelessly upon, or shut our eyes to the distress of others? That rather than pass by, or not

inquire into a case which may come before us, we should go out of our way to inquire, to seek out, to learn where we can be useful; where we can prove, by our kindness to our distressed neighbours, our sense of God's infinite goodness to us. And this is a fault, my loves, which we are too apt to fall into, more especially the rich, and those who have no cares and anxieties for their own support and bodily comforts.

Mary. I hope, Mamma, if ever we are rich, we shall remember this parable, and all that you have told us about it.

Mrs. B. My love, you must recollect, that it is not necessary to be rich, in order to show in the sight of God a kind and charitable spirit. He who well employed his five talents, attained the favour of his master equally with him who well employed his ten: the good dispositions may equally be shown with small means as with great. But whether you should be rich or poor, I trust you will remember and study, not only this parable, but all the Word of God, that it may dwell in your hearts and minds; and that by God's

Holy Spirit assisting you, you may "come behind in no good gift;" but be "not hearers only, but doers of the word;"¹ and that every holy precept and example may incite you, and God give you grace to "go and do likewise."

¹ James i. 22.





EIGHTH DAY.

Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

LUKE XVI. 19.

Mrs. B. JUST before we finished yesterday, we were talking of what were the duties, especially of the rich, in seeking out the afflictions of their fellow-creatures, rather than waiting to be told of them, and even than listening carelessly to them. This will bring us to-day to another part of that extensive virtue of Christian charity, which goes most commonly by that name, that of relieving the bodily distresses of others.

Henry. You mean, giving money to poor people, don't you, Mamma?

Mrs. B. I mean not giving money only, but food, clothing, medical assistance, and all those comforts which the rich can always procure, but of which the poor often stand in need, and with which it is more especially the duty of the rich to furnish those who are in want.

Henry. Yes, Mamma, I believe I meant all that, when I said money—I meant what people call “giving charity.” And now will you tell us the parable?

Mrs. B. Yes, my love, but before I do so, I must tell you that it was spoken more particularly to the Pharisees; “who,” the Evangelist says, “were covetous, and derided him,” on account of His poverty and humility. But Jesus, desirous to show them that all the advantages of this world, on which they prided themselves, such as wealth, learning, rank, and “all that is highly-esteemed among men,” so far from being important towards a man's eternal welfare, increase his punishment; and are, in His

own words, "abomination in the sight of God," if a man make not a right use of them; related to them the parable which we are now going to read, of the rich man and Lazarus.

"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple, and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day"

Henry. Why does it say, "clothed in purple," Mamma? Was there anything particular in that?

Mrs. B. Purple, my dear Henry, was considered among the ancients as the most beautiful and valuable colour; and the city of Tyre, which was at no very great distance from Jerusalem, was particularly celebrated, and owed a great part of its wealth to the art of dyeing cloth of this colour. It was very expensive, and was the colour always worn by emperors, kings, and great men, upon great occasions; so that in this place it means generally very rich and expensive clothes.

Mary. But, Mamma, is there any harm in wearing fine clothes, and having great din-

ners, and a great many people and servants, which is the meaning of faring sumptuously, is it not ?

Mrs. B. No, my love, no harm at all, provided that the heart is not allowed to attach itself too much to these luxuries and extravagances ; and that we do not lay out thoughtlessly upon them the money which ought to be spent in better objects, in relieving distress, and assisting our neighbours. We shall soon see how the case stood with this rich man. The parable continues :

“ And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table ; moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass that the beggar died ”

Mary. What, Mamma, while he was laid at the gate of this rich man, who would not help him, or do any thing for him ?

Mrs. B. It does not say expressly that he died in that very spot, though such a circumstance might well be supposed to increase

the guilt of this rich man (for you will remember this is an imaginary story); but at all events, it is plain that the rich man overlooked his distress, and gave him no assistance. And as we have stopped to consider the case, let us consider it fully. The parable says, "There was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores." What a complication of circumstances of distress and wretchedness. What misery on the one hand, and what selfish luxury on the other! While the rich man was feasting and rejoicing, making a selfish and uncharitable use of the good things of this world, which God had given him; one of his fellow-creatures, one of his brethren, his equal in the sight of that God, who "is no respecter of persons;" was at his very door in hunger and thirst, in sickness and nakedness, and longing "to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table." What he desired

would have been no sacrifice, but only the overflowings of that abundance with which God had blessed the rich man, but which he had made a curse, and not a blessing! And in this state were his wants attended to? No. Food, assistance, shelter, were denied him, and he was left in this pitiable state, at the rich man's gate, exposed to annoyance even from the very brutes: "the dogs came and licked his sores."

Mary. Poor man! how he must have wished to die at once!

Mrs. B. Death, my love, had, evidently, from what we hear afterwards, no terrors for him; it released him from his bodily sufferings, and yet more, it took him to that heavenly kingdom, "where (to use the beautiful words of the Revelation) they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb;" (that is, who are sanctified and saved by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God;) "are before the throne of God, and serve him day

and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them; nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from all eyes.”¹ To this blessed state, to the presence of God Himself, was the poor beggar taken—according to the parable, “the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom.”

Henry. Why does it say Abraham’s bosom, Mamma?

Mrs. B. Abraham, my love, was, as you know, the father of all the Jewish nation, and was, of course, regarded by them with the highest veneration. He was a holy and righteous man, and is even termed “the friend of God.”² The expression “being carried to Abraham’s bosom,” is of course figurative, and is taken from the ancient

¹ Rev. vii. 14—17.

² James ii. 23.

custom of lying down at meals, instead of sitting, as we do, so that the head of one person came nearly to the breast of another—as St. John is described in the last Supper of our Lord, as “leaning on Jesus’ bosom.”¹ This was of course a mark of intimacy and friendship, and in the present parable may be taken to mean, that in Heaven, whither he was carried by the angels, he was admitted to the love and affection of those holy and good men, who having faithfully served their Lord here, had “entered into his joy” in another world.

It is time to look now to the parable, and to the case of the rich man. He also, says the Bible, “died and was buried.” And here for a moment let us stop, and consider this awful change. A few days before, he was in the enjoyment (if his life could be enjoyment) of all that the world could give him—a splendid house, abundance of servants, wealth to gratify all his fancies, richly clothed, sumptuously fed, with every luxury

¹ John xiii. 23.

at his command ; while poor Lazarus, at his gate, covered with sores, and pining with hunger and disease, vainly longed for the crumbs which fell from his table.—Now the same Lazarus “hungers and thirsts no more” —“God has wiped away all tears from his eyes ;” and, in His presence, with the holy and just men of all ages, now made perfect, he enjoys eternal and unmixed happiness. “The rich man died and was buried ;” perhaps a pompous funeral was the last mark of distinction between the bodies of these two men, which equally went to that dust of which both were alike formed. But what was the condition of the souls, their immortal part ?

Henry. I should be afraid, Mamma, that the rich man was not carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom.

Mrs. B. The parable does not leave us in doubt : the awful continuation is—“And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments ; and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.”

How much of tremendous retribution,

what circumstances of misery; are there in these words, "In hell!" In the company of departed sinful spirits: in fearful expectation of the final judgment to come: suffering excruciating torments, and conscious that he had brought them upon himself—permitted to see the glories of heaven, and the happiness of the just, but to see them "afar off"—to know that he was for ever excluded from joining them; while he beheld exalted far above his own head, in the midst of that blessed company, the poor beggar Lazarus, whom he had spurned and despised in the self-sufficiency of his worldly pride.

Mary. I am quite sorry for him, Mamma, though he did deserve it; but how he must have repented now of his former conduct! How he must have wished he had used his money better!

Mrs. B. My love, it is a dreadful thought, but I fear it is one which is too clearly declared by Revelation for us to doubt, that in hell there is no hope and no repentance! None of that "repentance unto

salvation" which "sorroweth with a godly sorrow."¹ The means of such repentance are among the number of those precious talents committed to us here, which, if now neglected, are for ever lost. In the future world, our fate is fixed beyond the possibility of a change; the doom is gone forth, and repentance then can only be an useless repining over the past, extorted by the bitter pangs of hopeless torments. But hear what the rich man's expressions are—whether they point at any holy feeling, or whether they are not such as I have described.

"And he cried, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame."

Here, you see, is nothing but a cry of pain and anguish, and an entreaty that it may be lightened.

Henry. I think, Mamma, he had no right to expect that Lazarus would do anything

¹ 2 Cor. vii. 8. 10.

for him, considering how he had treated him while they were alive.

Mrs. B. Perhaps he considered Lazarus as still in the same abject state in which he had formerly known him; and forgot that the grave does away with all distinctions, except those of superior goodness and piety. But we may well imagine that it was an aggravation of his punishment, that he had now to solicit, that the same Lazarus, on whom he had refused to bestow so much as a morsel of bread, should be sent to give him even a moment's relief; even to "dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool his tongue."

Henry. Well, Mamma, and what did Abraham say to him?

Mrs. B. You shall hear. "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence."

Henry. I should think that none of the people who were in heaven would have any wish to pass over the gulf.

Mrs. B. Not certainly to change their place of happiness for that awful state of eternal misery. But among those blessed spirits there might have been some willing even to visit those scenes of horror, in order to relieve and soften the sufferings of the unhappy beings, whom their own sins had brought there. Lazarus, forgiving the ill-treatment which he had received on earth, might have been willing, if allowed, to alleviate the misery of his former enemy. But this, God, who, though a God of mercy, is a God of justice also, forbids.—And what a reflection is this, that our conduct here, for a very few years, must decide our future fate for all eternity!—for duration which we cannot conceive; but compared to which, all the ages that this world has lasted since the creation, are but as a single moment!

Mary. I wanted to ask you one question, Mamma. You read just now that Abraham told the rich man that he had had his good

things in this world, and Lazarus his evil things; and that therefore Lazarus was comforted, and he tormented. Surely it does not mean that all who have been happy here will be miserable afterwards, and all who have been miserable here will be happy there?

Mrs. B. Most assuredly not, my love: for that would be punishing or rewarding men for that over which they had no control, which would be evidently unjust. It is not upon our condition here, but upon the use we make of that condition, that our future fate depends. It is true that the rich are exposed to many temptations from which the poor are exempt—to the “cares and the pleasures of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches.” It is even true that our Saviour himself exclaims, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!”¹ But the poor have their temptations and their trials also; and a proper and charitable use of wealth, enjoying, but not abusing “the good things of this life,” is as

¹ Mark x. 23.

acceptable in the sight of God, as a patient and Christian resignation under those calamities and deprivations, with which, for His own wise purposes, He thinks fit to visit some of His creatures. The rich man in the parable was not condemned because he had been rich, but because he had misused his riches: Lazarus was not comforted because he had been poor and miserable, but because in all his sufferings he looked with patience and piety to God, and with charitable forgiveness to those who showed a want of charity to him. Do you understand this?

Henry. Oh! yes, Mamma, quite—but still I am very glad that you and Papa are not very rich, if it is so hard for a rich person to be good.

Mrs. B. My dear boy, in comparison with very many people in the world, *we are* rich; we have always a comfortable house, good food, good clothes, the means of giving something to our poorer neighbours: we are not obliged to labour from morning till night for our subsistence; but have leisure to instruct you in all your duty, and give you a good

education. We have health, and strength, and a variety of worldly blessings for which to be grateful; but I will own to you, I am thankful to God who has placed us in this situation, instead of exposing us to the temptations and the heavy responsibility of a very large fortune. At the same time, we may be quite sure, that he who uses, as a faithful steward, the portion of goods which God has given him here, be it large or small, will not be punished hereafter because he has gratefully enjoyed the worldly blessings which have been placed within his reach.

Mary. No, Mamma, I thought it could not mean that, but I was not quite sure. I quite understand it now—and will you go on with the parable?

Mrs. B. Yes, my love. After receiving this answer from Abraham, the poor victim in his torments thinks of the wretched state of those with whom he had been connected on earth; and his next request is for them. “Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house: for I have five brethren: that he may

testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment."

Mary. Well, Mamma, but that was good of him at least, was it not?

Mrs. B. It seems to have been an intimation, that in the future world our natural feelings and affections will not be broken off; and that even some good and kind sentiments may remain among those who are themselves for ever lost: Milton, the finest of our poets, whose writings I hope you will some day read and admire, says—

"For neither do the spirits damn'd
Lose all their virtue"—

and this is agreeable to the word of God. But in this request of the rich man, there might be also the tormenting thought, that he had himself been the means, by his example, and his life, of leading his brothers into careless, irreligious, uncharitable habits, and thereby to the eternal ruin of their souls: and this might well explain the anxiety which he felt to reclaim them even by a miracle.

Henry. But I hope, Mamma, Abraham let Lazarus go for this at least.

Mrs. B. You shall hear. "Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets : let them hear them."

Henry. Yes, Mamma, but so had every body else : but that is very different from a person who had been dead, coming back to tell them.

Mrs. B. But what right had the brothers of this man to be reclaimed by a miracle ? What reason was there that God should, for their sake, depart so widely from His ordinary course, as to allow a messenger to come to them from the dead ? You say very truly, that every body else, that is, all the Jews, "had Moses and the prophets ;" and these were sufficient guides to some, and therefore might have been sufficient for others, who chose to reject them. The rich man, however, thought with you, and still persevered in his request. "And he said, Nay, father Abraham ; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." But what is the answer ? "And he said unto him, If they

hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Henry. Oh! Mamma, but I cannot think that. Only fancy, how terrible it would be to have a person, who had been dead, come back to tell you, that if you did not behave better, you would be punished for ever and ever! Surely, one must be good after that.

Mrs. B. Remember, my dear Henry, who it is that makes this declaration which is put into the mouth of Abraham, that it is the Son of God, God Himself, who cannot deceive, nor be deceived, and who knows the heart of man far better than we can know it ourselves: and if, in what He declares, there is any thing that seems strange, or even incredible to us, we should satisfy ourselves not that He is mistaken, for that He cannot be, but that we are weak and ignorant. It is true, that a sudden miracle, or any unusual event, might cause serious thoughts, even in the most hardened sinner. But God knows best how long those thoughts may last, and He can work repentance in us, by the

slightest, as well as by the most powerful causes. Not to repeat again the argument of the unreasonableness of expecting such a miraculous interference in favour of one person, and not of all. But tell me, are there no wicked, or thoughtless, or irreligious people in the world at present?

Henry. Oh! yes, Mamma, a great many; but not any who have seen a person come from the dead to warn them.

Mrs. B. Not who have *seen* such a thing, I grant you, but who have *known* it, many hundreds and thousands.

Henry. How, Mamma? I do not understand you.

Mrs. B. No! Do we not know as certainly as any thing can be known, that Jesus Christ Himself came down on earth, died for our sins, *rose again from the dead*, and preached to us, and to all the world, repentance, faith in Him, and amendment of life?

Mary. Oh! yes, Mamma, I wonder we did not think of that at once, but then that was not like a common man being made alive again.

Mrs. B. It certainly was not; but the miracle was as great, and as astonishing; those who saw it could not have been deceived, and we have their undoubted testimony to the truth of the miracle. We know the reality of it as much as if we had seen it with our own eyes, and yet, though "One has risen from the dead," how many are there who are careless of His warning, disregard His commandments, think lightly of His threats, and His promises! He it is who speaks to us and to all the world, in this very parable which we have now been reading; He it is who says, "Ye have Moses and the prophets: hear ye them." And of Him again it is said to us, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him."¹ How much more call for our obedience, how much more reason for our love and gratitude! "Therefore," says St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, "we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was

¹ Matt. xvii. 5.

stedfast," (that is, if the word of God which He sent by the prophets, His messengers, proved true, and His promises and His threatenings came to pass, as the Jews knew they had done,) and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall *we* escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?"¹

Henry. Mamma, is it not very odd, that there should be any people who live wickedly, when they have been told be Jesus Christ Himself, what will happen to them afterwards?

Mrs. B. It is indeed strange, my love, and sad to think, how far too little we any of us reflect upon the promises and the word of God: and still more sad, how many persons live in utter disregard of Him; or, to use the Scripture expression, "Live without God in the world;" but of these I pray God that my dear children may never be; but

¹ Heb. ii. 1—3.

that whether rich or poor in this world's goods, they may remember from whom their riches, or their poverty proceed, and lay up for themselves treasure in heaven, which shall never be taken from them.

Henry. I hope so too, Mamma, and I am sure, if ever I am rich, I will try to be very good, and very charitable to all the poor people. But what became of the five brothers, Mamma, after all?

Mrs. B. My love, the parable ends here, for you will remember, that it is not a real story told to amuse curiosity, but a moral lesson given in a relation of imaginary circumstances; and this end being answered, it was needless to go further; but to show you still more strongly, how dear in the sight of God is this branch of that inestimable virtue of charity, I will read to you, before we close, the description which *He* gives, who only could give it, Jesus Christ, of the last day, when he shall come to judge all the world, rich and poor alike. "When the Son of Man," says our Lord, "shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then

shall he sit upon the throne of his glory : and before him shall be gathered all nations : and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me in : naked, and ye clothed me : I was sick, and ye visited me ; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee ? or thirsty, and gave thee drink ? When saw we thee a stranger and took them in ? or naked, and clothed thee ? or when saw we thee sick or in prison, and came unto thee ? And the King shall answer, and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he

say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels : for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me not in : naked, and ye clothed me not : sick and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee ? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.”¹

Mary. Thank you, dear Mamma, that is very beautiful indeed ; but there is one thing that I want to ask you : If none can be rewarded, but those that feed, and clothe, and visit the poor and naked, what is to become of the poor themselves ? for they cannot afford it.

¹ Matt. xxv. 31—46.

Mrs. B. My love, God will not require of any that which they cannot do ; we shall be judged according to that which we have, and not according to that which we have not. But there are few, if any, who have not some means of relieving, or assisting, or showing kindness to others ; what God requires is, that we should show mercy, remembering His mercy to us ; and if we give in this spirit, our gifts, however small, will be accepted by Him. He has even told us Himself, that “ Whosoever shall give a cup of cold water to drink, in his name, verily he shall in no wise lose his reward.”¹ But we must put off any further discussion till another day, for it is already late, and we must not enter upon any fresh subject.

¹ Matt. x. 42, and Mark ix. 41.



NINTH DAY.

Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.

LUKE XVIII. 9.

Mrs. B. WELL, Henry, what is it that has given you that very triumphant look to-day?

Henry. Oh! Mamma, I think we have made a good use of your parables; I think Mary and I have been like the good Samaritan, and I think I know somebody that has been like the rich man that you told us of yesterday.

Mrs. B. It always gives me pleasure to hear that you have acted rightly ; but why should you be glad that you have seen somebody act in a very unworthy and unchristian manner ?

Henry. No, Mamma, it is not *that* that I am glad of, but only only

Mrs. B. Well, my love, let me hear the case, and then I shall be a better judge.

Henry. Why, Mamma, as we were walking just outside the gate, we saw a very poor very wretched looking old man

Mary. No, Henry, he was not an old man.

Henry. Well, but he was very poor, was not he, Mary ? And so, Mamma, there was a gentleman coming on horseback, and the poor man began to beg of him—and the gentleman did not give him any thing, but said, he ought to be ashamed of begging, when he might work ; and so, Mamma, when the gentleman said so, as soon as he was gone by, I went up and said, Here, poor man, if that gentleman won't give you any thing, I will—and so I gave him the new

half-crown that Grandmamma gave me, and Mary gave him a shilling, which was all she had. But why do you look so grave, Mamma? Did not we do a great deal better than the gentleman?

Mrs. B. I am afraid, my dear Henry, you have a very poor notion of the conduct of the good Samaritan, when you think that you were like him; and that you have a still poorer of another essential part of Christian charity, that of judging favourably of the conduct of your neighbours.

Henry. Why, Mamma, I thought the gentleman was like the priest and the Levite, that you said passed by without attending to the poor man; and so I was determined to show that I was better than they were, and like the good Samaritan who helped the poor man when he was in distress.

Mrs. B. And do you think, my dear Henry, that the wish of the Samaritan was to show that he was better than the priest or the Levite?

Henry. No, Mamma, not exactly to show

that he was better, but I think he must have felt very happy that he had behaved so much better than they had.

Mrs. B. I do not doubt, my love, supposing it to be a real history, that he would have been glad that he had behaved so well; but I am sorry you should think he would be glad that he had behaved better than others. But as you do, let me ask you a question or two. In the first place, whom are you most anxious to please?

Henry. You, Mamma, and Papa.

Mrs. B. On earth, my dear boy, I hope you are; but remember you have a heavenly Parent, whom you should be still more anxious to please.

Henry. Oh! yes, Mamma, I did not think of your meaning that.

Mrs. B. And what does He say? Does He promise to reward those who act better than others?

Henry. Yes, Mamma.

Mrs. B. Does He?—He promises to reward, with eternal life, those who labour, by His grace assisting them, to obey His Word,

whether they are more or fewer? but He never promises to choose a certain number of the best people in the world, and to reject the rest.

Henry. No, Mamma; but if we are the best people in the world, God will reward us rather than others, will He not?

Mrs. B. My love, God measures our reward by our faith in His Son, and our obedience to His Word; and not by our superiority or inferiority to others. We are judged by our own conduct, and not by that of any one else. We gain nothing by their misconduct, and at the last day it will avail us nothing to plead that there have been others worse than ourselves.

Henry. No, Mamma, I suppose not.

Mrs. B. Then, my love, I must ask you to answer honestly, what was your *motive* in giving money to this poor man? Was it from an earnest desire to serve God, by doing good to one of His creatures; or was it from a wish to show yourself in a more favourable point of view than the gentleman whom you mention? Was it because the poor man

wanted money, or because the rich man did not give it?

Henry (after a pause). Why, Mamma, I think it was partly both. I think I should have thought that the poor man wanted it; but, perhaps, I should not have thought it *so much*, if the gentleman had given it him—and then I thought, now I will show that I am good, and that he is not. I believe it was so, Mamma.

Mrs. B. I believe so too, my dear boy; and I am glad that you have the honesty to own it, now that I have led you to look to your motives: and now I think that you can go on with the inquiry for yourself. Do you think that your conduct to this beggar at all resembled that of the good Samaritan?

Henry. No, Mamma, I am afraid not. I am afraid I thought only of the good we had done to the poor man, and not why we gave him our money. But you are not angry with us for giving him the money, Mamma, are you?

Mrs. B. I am not angry with you cer-

tainly, and I am pleased to see that you are so ready to admit your fault: but I think it highly probable that you did a foolish thing in giving money at all to this poor beggar, certainly in giving so large a sum to one person, without knowing whether he were deserving or not.

Henry. But ought we not to give money to beggars at all, Mamma?

Mrs. B. I do not say that, my dear boy, but it is as much our duty not to give to the idle and wicked, as it is to assist the industrious, and to relieve the sick and the infirm. By your account the gentleman told him that he ought to be ashamed of begging instead of working; and it is extremely probable that he knew the man's character, and that he could procure employment, but preferred idleness. I do not know that this was the case; but if it was, the gentleman was the really charitable person, by refusing to encourage idleness in giving away, as you did, a sum to one beggar, which an industrious labourer could scarcely earn by two days' hard work. This mode of giving is

not charity, but extravagance ; and you will have deprived yourself of the pleasure of relieving more than one really deserving person, by giving to one who, very possibly, was not so.

Henry. But, Mamma, if the gentleman did not know that this beggar was idle, surely he ought not to have refused him, or scolded him ?

Mrs. B. Certainly not, my love : but as certainly, unless you know to the contrary, you are bound to believe that his refusal proceeded from a good motive, and not from a bad one ; that he would gladly have relieved a person in real distress, but would not be duped by, and encourage, an impostor. And in believing this, you exercise towards this gentleman another very important branch of that extensive virtue, Christian charity.

Henry. Charity to the gentleman, Mamma I do not know how you mean.

Mrs. B. There are two points in the description of charity given by St. Paul, in the passage I have before quoted, which we may

apply to our present case ; as relating to the judgments which we form of *our own* actions, and of those of *others*. For the first: "Charity," he says, "vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up;"¹ or, in the words of the Psalms, "setteth not by herself, but is lowly in her own eyes."² And for the second, she "thinketh no evil."³ A most comprehensive expression, and a point in which this Christian virtue may be most strongly shown and perpetually exercised, in putting upon the actions of our neighbours the fairest and most favourable construction—not hastily judging or condemning them, not believing that they act from improper motives, but the contrary, if possible ; and leaving judgment to that great Searcher of all things, "To whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid." The Scriptures with more than common earnestness insist upon the necessity of both these exercises of charity. "Be kindly affectioned," says St. Paul, "one towards another with brotherly

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 4.² Psalm xv. 4.³ 1 Cor. xiii. 5.

love, in honour preferring one another ;”¹ and again in the same chapter, “Be not wise in your own conceits.”² “Judge not,” says Jesus Himself, “that ye be not judged ;”³ and to the Pharisees, “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised (that is, were ready to condemn and think ill of) others”⁴ without sufficient cause, He spoke a parable, which I think, under all circumstances, we may as well take for our reading of to-day. It is not a very long one, and our conversation has already encroached a little on our usual time. “Two men,” said our Saviour, “went up into the temple to pray ; the one a Pharisee and the other a publican.”

Mary. I do not think, Mamma, that I know what a publican was among the Jews ; I know that it was not what it means with us.

Mrs. B. The publicans were those persons who, when the Jewish nation became tributary (that is, had to pay taxes) to the

¹ Rom. xii. 10.

² Rom. xii. 16.

³ Matt. vii. 1.

⁴ Luke xviii. 9.

Romans, by whom they had been conquered had the charge of collecting them, and paying them over to their foreign masters. The Jews considered it highly disgraceful to pay tribute to a foreign government; and accordingly the publicans, or tax-gatherers, who filled so odious an office, were held in great contempt and abhorrence by the rest of the Jews. It is very possible indeed, that from the general contempt which was entertained for this office, it was often in the hands of persons of low condition and indifferent character, as few others could be induced to take it. But no doubt there were, even among the publicans, many honest and good persons.

Mary. Mamma, I think I remember that Jesus was reproached for living with publicans and sinners, and I now see why they were put together.

Mrs. B. Yes, my love, you are quite right; and it is very possible that the publican, in the parable which we are about to read, was (as indeed, which of us is not?) a sinner. Be that as it may, he was a repentant sinner, for he was come into the

temple to pray. So, indeed, was the Pharisee. Both were in the immediate presence of an all-seeing God who knew all their actions, thoughts, and dispositions ; but who judged of them not as men judged. " The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican ! "

Henry. But how did he know, Mamma, what the publican was ?

Mrs. B. I am glad to see you can reason so justly, and see how absurd, and how worse than absurd, it is for one of us to pretend to judge of the merits and feelings of another. I only wish you were always as ready to act upon this knowledge, and not to condemn others too hastily, in cases where you probably know little or nothing.

Henry. Oh, Mamma, I hope you are not angry with me ; I see that I was very wrong about that gentleman this morning, but I hope you do not think me like the Pharisee, who made such a beginning to his prayers.

Mrs. B. No, my dear little boy, I am not angry with you, and as I told you just now, I am very glad to see that you can own that you have been wrong. I hope that your prayers to God will be very unlike those of the Pharisee, and that, instead of thanking God that you are better than others, you will pray to Him to be made day by day better than you are; and that all your neighbours (that is, all men in the world) may be made better also, by the aid of His Holy Spirit. And now, my love, we will go on with the parable, and say no more about the gentleman and the beggar, for I think you will remember what we have said, and not be so hasty and uncharitable in your opinion another time.

We left off, you remember, where the Pharisee thanks God, that he is not like his poor humble neighbour. His prayer goes on: "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."

Mary. But, Mamma, he did not call that a prayer, did he?

Mrs. B. Certainly, my love, it was very

unlike what prayer ought to be, a confession of our own unworthiness, thanks for God's unmerited goodness, and a humble petition that He would continue His mercy to us. On the contrary, this proud Pharisee, while he affects, indeed, to thank God, in reality, only boasts of his own imagined virtues, or rather not of his virtues, but of his freedom from the faults of others. And when he comes to speak of his own merits, what are they? "I fast," says he, "twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."—I comply, that is, with the outward ordinances of the religion which I have learnt, and perform carefully those ceremonial observances which make a fair show before men. But he forgot that he was then addressing himself to that God "Who seeth not as man seeth,"¹—"Who trieth the heart and the reins,"² that is, the inward affections, the motives, the sincerity of our conduct; he forgot that in the sight of that God all are sinners alike—that the difference between the best and

¹ Job. x. 4.² Psalm vii. 9.

worst of men (supposing that he had been the one, and his poor neighbour the other) is as nothing compared with the infinite distance between the best of men and the divine perfections of that eternal God. But let us go on to the contrast—let us hear now the publican. “He,” says the parable, “standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.” “Which of these two,” as Jesus said on another occasion, “did the will of his Father?”¹

Mary. I should think the publican, Manma, for he really did pray; he prayed to God to be merciful to him.

Mrs. B. And how did he pray?—“standing afar off:” that is, not daring to approach what was considered, more peculiarly, the holy part of the temple, to which the proud Pharisee had boldly gone, not questioning *his* right, nor examining *his* merits; “not lifting up so much as his eyes unto heaven;” but with humbled

¹ Matt. xxi. 31.

and penitent looks, with downcast eyes, and a contrite heart, smiting upon his breast, in sign of his wickedness and of his sorrow, he made his prayer to God, "who despiseth not the sighing of a contrite heart, nor the desire of such as be sorrowful."

And now, what was his prayer? It was short, but it was comprehensive: not only "God be merciful to me," but "God be merciful to me a sinner." As if he had said, "I am a sinful man, O Lord."¹ "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me."² I have no claims upon Thy goodness, and if Thy justice be dealt out to me strictly, I must be for ever lost: but give me, O God! that which I do not deserve, "be merciful to me a sinner:" forgive my past sins, and enable me to forsake them (for this last must, of course, be implied). This, my loves, is the frame and disposition of heart in which God will have us pray to Him. And Jesus, having related the parable, confirms

¹ Luke v. 8.

² Psalm li. 3.

your opinion of the merits of the two, adding, immediately, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." And He adds the reason, which was——

Mary. That one really did pray, Mamma, and the other did not.

Mrs. B. That one really did pray, and prayed *humbly*; that the poor publican, with all the disadvantages of his education and his early habits, had that Christian virtue of humility "which is in the sight of God of great price;"¹ humility towards God, and humility also (which is charity) towards men: while the Pharisee, with all his boasted acquirements and supposed merits, approached his Maker without self-abasement, and looked down with contempt on his fellow-creature. And Jesus adds this momentous warning to all men, in all ages, and in all circumstances: "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased;" and this comfort, also, to those who seek it rightly,

¹ 1 Pet. iii. 4.

that "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Mary. But is it right, Mamma, to seek to be exalted? And if it is not, why does Jesus offer it as a reward?

Mrs. B. Of what exaltation do you suppose He speaks? Not surely of worldly honours, or wealth, or glory; least of all of worldly triumph over those who have exalted themselves, and who will be abased; but of that best exaltation at the last day, when the faithful and humble servants of God shall hear the glorious voice, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom which hath been prepared for you from the foundation of the world."¹ "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."² To this exaltation we are not only permitted, but commanded to look, as the "prize of" our "high calling,"³ as the end of all our being, and the object of all our hopes.

Henry. Mamma, you said just now, that

¹ Matt. xxv. 34.

² Matt. xiii. 43.

³ Phil. iii. 14.

humility was charity. I did not quite know how you meant.

Mrs. B. I should rather have said, my love, that humility towards men was a part, and a very essential part, of charity: for it is by a want of humility, by a too good opinion of our own merits, that we are led to compare them with those of others, and, like the proud Pharisee, to look down on those who, perhaps, are really our superiors. If we think humbly of ourselves, we shall never think contemptuously, or uncharitably, of others. If we consider how much we need forgiveness, we shall be ready to forgive others: if we consider how little our own motives will bear being inquired into, we shall not be too ready to condemn those of others; we shall remember these two warnings, "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged."¹ And in these two consists no small part of Christian charity. Do you understand me now?

Henry. Yes, Mamma, quite; thank you.

¹ Luke vi. 37.

Mrs. B. And I trust, my dear children, that what you understand, you may, by the grace of God, be enabled to practise: and especially this Christian virtue of humility, which though essential to all, is yet peculiarly the ornament and the blessing of childhood; that following His blessed example, who, though the Son of God, humbled Himself, and was obedient to His earthly parents, you may, like Him, "increase in wisdom and in stature, and in favour both with God and with man."¹

¹ Luke ii. 52.





TENTH DAY.

“I AM afraid, my dears,” said Mrs. B. the following day, “that our stock of parables is nearly exhausted.”

“Oh! Mamma!” exclaimed both the children at once, in a tone of disappointment.

“But surely, Mamma,” said Mary, “there are a great many more parables in the Bible.”

Mrs. B. There are several more, my love; but some of them I should hardly be able to make you fully understand; and others are expressed in so short sentences as to be hardly stories, and are to be read with more

advantage in connexion with the history as it is contained in the Bible itself. There are, however, two more, which I propose that we should read together; but let us first consider, shortly, those which we have been reading, and the *principal* lesson of each of them. Do you remember, Mary, what was the first that we read?

Mary. Oh, yes, Mamma, I remember that quite well. It was the Sower and the Seed.

Mrs. B. And the meaning?

Mary. It was the way in which different people receive the Word of God, and how we ought to let it grow like the seed, in our hearts.

Mrs. B. Very well, Mary. And the next, Henry?

Henry. Was it not the Servants and the Pounds, Mamma? And to show us how we ought to improve our talents, like the servants who were to trade with their money?

Mrs. B. Quite right, my dear boy. We then went, if you remember, into three parables at once:—The Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Silver, and the Prodigal Son.

Mary. Oh, that long beautiful parable ! How well I remember that !

Mrs. B. Well, my love, then tell me the moral of it.

Mary. Oh, Mamma, there was so much ! But the chief thing was to show us how we ought to repent, when we have done wrong, and how God would receive us if we did.

Mrs. B. Very well, my dear girl. And now look at these five parables, and see how large a portion they express of our first duty—duty to God. In the first, we learn the necessity of *Faith*, by which we receive into our hearts His Holy Word, letting it grow there, and flourish, and bring forth fruit. In the second, we learn *actively* to *exercise* our faith, and to employ the means of good which God has placed in our power, remembering, that for all of them we must give an account to Him who gave them. The three others teach us that most comfortable doctrine of *Repentance* ; by which we learn, that after all our sins, we yet may turn to our God, as to a merciful and loving Father, with fear, and love, and godly sorrow ; and that those

who so come to Him, He will again receive, and the angels of heaven will rejoice over their return. From these we passed to our duty to our neighbours; in one word, to *Christian charity*; not forgetting that our duty to them is part of our duty to God; that our love for them should proceed from our love to God; and that our conduct to them should be a humble imitation of the conduct of God to us. Do you recollect, Henry, which was the first of this second set?

Henry. I am not sure that I remember which was next. Was it the good Samaritan?

Mrs. B. Nor does it much signify which we took next in order: but you have not forgotten the two servants, have you?

Henry. Oh! no, Mamma; the one who owed more than he could pay, and whose master forgave him, and who afterwards would make the other servant pay him the little debt? Oh! no, I had not forgotten that; but I did not remember where it came.

Mrs. B. But the moral, my love?

Henry. That we ought to forgive all men

who have offended us, Mamma, because God forgives us so much more ?

Mrs. B. Quite right, my dear boy. This parable then enjoins, as one part of our duty to our neighbour, or Christian charity (which you will remember is the same thing), *forgiveness* of offences against us, as we hope and pray to be forgiven; "being kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us."¹ The parable of the good Samaritan, again, is a lesson of more *active beneficence*: not of *forgiving* all, but of *doing good* to our neighbours: the term neighbours meaning all mankind, under all circumstances, at all times, however inconvenient to our ourselves, and however little we may be in the world connected with them. Now, the third parable, Mary.

Mary. Was it not the Rich Man and Lazarus ?

Mrs. B. Yes, my love; perhaps the most limited in its application, but certainly not

¹ Ephes. iv. 32.

the least important; for though few opportunities may occur of more special acts of beneficence, yet "the poor," says our Lord, "ye have always with you;"¹ and judiciously, yet liberally, to relieve their wants, and to minister to their distresses, is no small part of the responsibility of those who have enough and to spare of this world's goods. Again, this parable reminds us, that while we have opportunity, we should "do good unto all men;"² knowing that, after our death, there will be no longer room for repentance, nor for good works; that then "the night cometh, when no man can work."³

The fourth parable was the one which we read yesterday, which enjoins humility towards God, and charitable judgment towards men; and which, as we have so lately read it, we need not enter into again. Once more, let us look back at the summary of all enjoined us, in what we have read.

1st. Faith in God, and a devout acceptance of His most Holy Word.

¹ Matt. xxvi. 11.

² Gal. vi. 10.

³ John ix. 4.

2nd. An active exercise of that faith, in such good works as are its fruit and effects.

3rd. A sincere repentance of our sins past, and a stedfast resolution to forsake them for the future.

Then comes our duty to our neighbours, including, 1st. A ready forgiveness of all their offences, remembering who has forgiven us, and how much He has forgiven.

2nd. Universal beneficence to all mankind, knowing that all are children of the same Father and God.

3rd. Kindness and liberality to the poor and needy, knowing that "he that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord."¹

And, lastly, Charitable judgment of the thoughts and actions of others; since we are assured that "with what measure we mete, it shall be measured unto us again."²

Though much more, no doubt, might be added, and though every line of the sacred writings will teach us, more and more, how sedulously we ought to keep the commandments of God, and walk in His holy ways;

¹ Prov. xix. 17.

² Matt. vii. 2.

yet, believe me, dear children, that if we bear in mind these precepts, and study to act up to them, by the mercy of our God, we shall not be "far from the kingdom of Heaven."

And now, my loves, having, by our former parables, learnt what is our duty to God and to man, we will see how it is that God calls us to perform those duties; whom He calls, and what we must expect, if we refuse to obey His call, or render ourselves unfit for attending upon it.

Parable of the Marriage of the King's Son.

MATT. XXII. 2.

Mrs. B. "THE kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king" (you see here the same form of beginning, upon which we made some remarks a few days ago), "which made a marriage for his son:" or rather, who made a feast on the occasion of the marriage

of his son: "and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden" (or invited) "to the wedding; and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, tell them which are bidden, behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye, therefore, into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good; and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had

not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness."

Henry. What, because he was not well dressed enough, Mamma? Surely that was not right of the king; particularly when he had asked him in himself.

Mrs. B. My dear boy, your objection, which, however, does not surprise me, proceeds from your thinking of the manners and habits of the present day, in which it would not only be highly unjust to act in the way you imagine the king to have acted (as indeed it would have been in that day if you had quite correctly stated the circumstances), but it would also be preposterous and absurd for a king, upon the marriage of his son, or any great occasion, to send out for his guests literally into the highways and hedge-sides. But in the times and country in which our Saviour lived, there

was nothing ridiculous or extraordinary in either of these circumstances. It was no uncommon thing for great persons, upon great occasions, to give feasts, which lasted sometimes several days together, at which all who came, travellers and others, of whatever rank in life were received and fed : a part of the entertainment consisted also in giving to such of the guests as had them not, suitable dresses for the occasion. "Changes of raiment," you will find, in reading the history of the Bible, spoken of as a present often made by a person to his guests. And you remember, in reading the parable of the Prodigal Son, they brought out "the best robe and put it on him." Dresses being thus furnished by the master of the feast to all who applied for them, it was a piece of disrespect, amounting to an insult, to come to the table without such a preparation ; and merited that which in this instance it received, being turned out from the brilliant feast into the darkness and gloom of the street.

Mary. But is that what is meant by "outer darkness," Mamma? Because I thought it meant much worse than that.

Mrs. B. So it is explained by the commentators, my love, on this passage: in the spiritual sense, indeed, being turned away from the heavenly feast But before we go to this, we had better go through the meaning of the parable generally. Do you understand the meaning of it, Mary?

Mary. No, Mamma, I do not think I do; I was trying as you read it, but I could not make anything of it.

Mrs. B. Let us see, then, what we can make out together. In the first place, the king, the giver of the feast, was—?

Mary. God, Mamma.

Mrs. B. And the feast to which He called or invited a certain number at first—?

Mary. Oh! I see, Mamma, the parable is against the Jews, who were first called to be Christians, and who would not.

Mrs. B. Now, my love, you have the

right key to the meaning of the parable. It was spoken against the Jews in the first instance, yet not without a prophetic warning to us, to all persons in future ages of the world, which we shall do well to ponder in our hearts. With God's assistance, then, we will endeavour to see what lessons we are able to draw from this parable.

God, as we have seen, is the King, who prepares of His bounty a great feast, and prepares it too on account, and in honour, of, His Son: to this feast he invites a chosen number of persons, and from time to time He sends forth His servants and messengers to warn them of the invitation; at length He sends to announce to them, that the feast was actually prepared, that all things "were ready." This, as you partly saw, Mary, was the dealing of Almighty God, with regard to the Jewish nation. From a very early time, God chose them out to be a peculiar people, to "keep his statutes and observe his laws;"¹ and to preserve the expectation

¹ Psalm cv. 45.

of that great promised Messiah, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. To the Jews He sent His messengers, the prophets, calling His people to repentance, and they would not hear : and lastly, to the Jews first, He sent His long-promised Son, saying, " Come, for all things are ready ; " ¹ come, for the prophecies are now accomplished ; come, and I will bring you the " bread of life ; " and " the water of life, who-soever drinketh of which shall never thirst ; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. " ² How then did they receive the invitation to this inestimable feast ? " They made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise ; and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. "

Mary. But did Jesus mean this parable as a prophecy, Mamma, of what they would do to Himself ? For He was one of the servants, was He not ?

¹ Luke xiv. 17.

² John iv. 14.

Mrs. B. No doubt, my love, He who "took upon him the form of a servant,"¹ here represents Himself as one of those sent out by the king to call the Jews to the heavenly feast; and no doubt that He intended to foretel, in this discourse, what would happen to Himself; and also, what in a most signal manner did happen shortly after to His murderers. And having seen the accomplishment of one part of the punishment threatened, let us be more and more careful to avoid that heavy visitation which is afterwards denounced. But let us look a little more closely at the conduct of the Jews: when this feast of heavenly things was held out to them, what did they do?

Mary. "They made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise."

Mrs. B. That is, they treated contemptuously the gracious invitation, because it interfered with the amusements or the business of the present world: they were occupied with the cares of this life, and the

¹ Phil. ii. 7.

deceitfulness of riches, and they neglected the good tidings of great joy, which were to be to all nations. But I am afraid the Jews are not the only people to whom this blame might be attached. Are there none among us, who are Christians, who "make light of the call which God has given us, through His Son? None among us, who think more of our business and our amusements, "our farms, and our merchandize," than of that heavenly feast to which we are invited, that treasure which is laid up for us, "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where no thieves can break through and steal?"¹

Mary. Mamma, I have often thought that if we had lived at the same time with Jesus Christ, and heard Him, and seen His miracles, we could not have helped believing in Him, and then we must have obeyed Him, and followed Him.

Mrs. B. My love, His rejection by the Jews was a melancholy instance of the power of prejudice to close the human heart,

¹ Matt. vi. 20.

even against the clearest evidence; but while we condemn them, we alike condemn ourselves in almost all our daily conduct. What evidence had they which we have not? We have equal means of being convinced of the truth of His Gospel; of the reality of His miracles. If we believe in His word, we have it before us, as surely coming from Him as if we heard it from His own mouth; and if we do not make it the guide of all our actions, we are just as guilty as they were. Nay, we are more unjustifiable still, for we have no deep-rooted national prejudices to contend against; no early impressions to overcome: "from a child" we have each of us "known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation."¹ Again, the Jews, when they were first called upon to follow our Saviour, to be the early disciples and teachers of His word, were called upon to forsake all that they had, which was most dear to them; "to sell whatsoever they had, and give to the poor,

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 15.

and take up their cross, and follow him,"¹ through perils, and persecutions, and death. *We* are called on to make no such sacrifices; we are not ordered to give up father, or mother, or husband, or wife, or children for His name's sake: we are not forbidden to attend to our "farm and our merchandise;" but we *are* called on, not so to set our hearts upon any of these things, as to "make light" of the call to His heavenly feast. But let us now return to our parable, and to that part of it which more immediately relates to the Jews. The neglect of the invitation, which it was their duty to have obeyed, led them to feel angry with those messengers who were sent to warn them of their duty: and thus, as one sin almost always leads to others worse, they ended by "despitefully entreating," and at last murdering them.

Mary. But what excuse had they, Mamma? What reason for murdering the servants who were sent to invite them?

¹ Mark x. 21.

Mrs. B. No excuse, my love ; no reason, no palliation ; their anger at those who warned them of their sin, in neglecting the invitations of their Lord, was probably the cause, but certainly not an excuse, for their conduct. Yet such had been, and such Jesus well knew would be, the behaviour of the Jews ; and He well knew also, and foretold in the next verse of the parable, what should be the consequence of their crimes. "The king sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city." And in less than fifty years after this parable was uttered, while many yet lived who had heard it, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman armies, which God had permitted to go up against it, and take it.

Mary. But I should think such a wonderful event must have convinced all the world of the truth of our Saviour's prophecies.

Mrs. B. At all events, it may well serve to add to, and to confirm our faith ; and to strengthen us in our resolutions to follow

His holy commandments; knowing that "though heaven and earth shall pass away, His words shall not pass away,"¹ but shall all be fulfilled. But let us go on with the explanation of our parable. Who are those, Mary, who were ordered to be collected from the highways?

Mary. I suppose, Mamma, if the first people who were asked meant the Jews, that the others meant all the rest of the world.

Mrs. B. Quite right, my dear girl; this parable points out, in the plainest terms, that great doctrine of the Christian religion, which was to the "Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness,"² that the Jews were no longer to be exclusively the people of God: a doctrine which even the Apostles themselves were slow to believe, till long after the resurrection of their Lord; and which when Peter was at last compelled to acknowledge, made him cry out in astonishment and joy, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in

¹ Matt. xxiv. 35.

² 1 Cor. i. 23.

every nation, he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him."¹ And yet it is one which, throughout the prophetic writings, is clearly and distinctly foretold, from the promise made to Abraham, that in one of his descendants "should all the nations of the earth be blessed,"² down to the very last of the prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah.

Mary. But how was it, Mamma, that the Jews did not understand these prophecies?

Mrs. B. They interpreted them in a different manner: they expected that the Messiah was to be a great earthly prince and conqueror, who should restore their nation to more than its former glory, and subject all others to His power: and they refused to admit the claims of Him, who came into their city, "meek and sitting upon an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass."³ But let us rather consider what rea-

¹ Acts x. 34, 35.

² Gen. xxii. 18.

³ Matt. xxi. 5. Zech. ix. 9.

son we have to bless God, who of His wonderful providence has so ordered the course of events, as to supply the place of those who would not come, with all the rest of mankind; with those who, "in the highways and hedges," were removed from all apparent chance of partaking of the heavenly banquet, till they were graciously called by Him, who would have all men come to Him.

Mary. Still, Mamma, I do not quite understand what is meant by the man who had not on a wedding garment. You explained quite well what it meant in the parable, but I suppose there is some other meaning, is there not?

Mrs. B. Most assuredly there is, and an awful meaning, which I will make clear to you immediately. You, remember, that of those who were first asked, none were admitted to the supper; but their places were filled by others, who were called from all quarters, and furnished, upon their request, by the king, with suitable garments to appear at the feast. One, how-

ever, was found without such a garment; and he, though he had been invited, was finally rejected and cast out. Now, the first asked were the Jews, who denied and slighted our Lord: their places in the favour of God, and in the admission to His house, were filled with Gentiles of all nations and languages; but upon conditions. There was a preparation to be made, something to be sought for to render us "meek partakers of that holy" feast; and that something we are told to ask for, and we shall have. Now, Mary, do you understand what is the wedding garment of a Christian guest at the great feast?

Mary. I am not sure, Mamma; does it mean goodness?

Mrs. B. Goodness, my love, in its most comprehensive shape; for goodness alone, if by the word you mean mere moral goodness, does not approach to the preparation which we are required to make. To explain it shortly and fully, I should say the wedding garment meant a "Chris-

tian spirit:" such a general frame and temper of mind as inclines us always to look to God, to believe in His blessed Son, to worship Him; to love Him, to fear and serve Him; a spirit of which the fruits are, according to St. Paul, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance:"¹ a spirit of purity, represented by the clean robe which was put on the guests: a spirit, in short, such as can only come from God Himself, and which will surely lead us to God.

Mary. But how are we to obtain such a spirit, Mamma?

Mrs. B. There is one only way, my love, but it is a sure way—by prayer to Him who only can give it. To those who diligently seek for it, He says, "Every one that asketh receiveth, and he who seeketh findeth:"² but those who have it not, He will surely exclude from His table, and thrust into outer darkness; "there," as Jesus says, in concluding the parable, "shall be weeping and

¹ Gal. v. 22, 23.

² Matt. vii. 8.

gnashing of teeth." And He adds these awful words: "For many are called, but few chosen."

Mary. But surely, Mamma, this does not mean that few people in the world will be saved?

Mrs. B. It is a fearful question, and one which we should not hastily decide upon: God only knows what is meant here by the words "many" and "few."¹ He only knows who will, and who will not be saved: for us, I know no safer answer that can be given, than that which Jesus gave to one

¹ There is a passage in Fuller's "Good Thoughts in Bad Times," so applicable to the present subject, and the concluding sentence of which is one in which I have so much reason to join, that I cannot refrain from quoting it at length; especially as the language is simple enough to be quite intelligible to my young readers. "In the parable of the four sorts of ground whereon the seed was sown, the last alone proved fruitful. There the bad were more than the good: but amongst the servants, two improved their talents or pounds, and only one buried them: there the good were more than the bad. Again, amongst the ten virgins, 'five were wise, and five foolish:' there the good and bad were equal. I see that concerning the number of the saints, in comparison to the reprobates, no certainty can be collected from these parables: good reason,

of His disciples, when he asked Him nearly the same question that you have done: "Lord, are there few that be saved? And He said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait (or narrow) gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."¹ That is to say, be not over curious in considering the concerns of others; but knowing that the path to eternal life is narrow and difficult, strive, for your own parts, carefully to follow the guidance of God's word, which shall finally bring you to the gate of Heaven.

Mary. Mamma, that seemed to me not quite I mean it seemed different from what you said just now, that all who prayed for God's assistance should have it—and here it says, that "many shall *seek* to enter in, and shall not be able." That seems a contradiction, does it not?

Mrs. B. No, my love, not if you consider it is not their principal purpose to meddle with that point. Grant, Lord, that I may never rack a Scripture simile, beyond the true intent thereof; lest, instead of sucking milk, I squeeze blood out of it."

¹ Luke xiii. 23, 24.

sider it properly; the Bible says, indeed, "many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able;" but it does not say *how* they will seek; it does not say that they will pray and *seek* for God's assistance, without which all their endeavours will be nothing worth. "It is not meant that any Christian will ever sincerely do his best to enter into life eternal, and fail in it; but that many imagine that God has marked out other ways to happiness than obeying His laws; and many too, who are fully sensible there is no other way, use so little diligence in following this, that their progress is insufficient to make them arrive at eternal felicity."¹ Do you understand this, Mary?

Mary. Yes, Mamma, I believe I do now: but it is surely a dreadful thought that so many persons will be miserable for ever!

Mrs. B. It is a dreadful thought, my dear child; but the certainty that such

¹ Archbishop Secker. Notes to Mant's Bible. Matt. vii. 24.

will be the case; "that wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat;"¹ should have at least this effect upon us, to make us doubly careful of our own conduct, doubly watchful over our own hearts, and doubly earnest in our prayers to that blessed Saviour, who is "the way, and the truth, and the life;"² and who Himself hath told us, "Without Me ye can do nothing."³ May that God, who has called us all to the feast of His blessed Son, in mercy grant that when the King cometh in to see the guests, we may be found clothed with the wedding garment of Christian faith; or in the words of the Revelation which we quoted once before, "with robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb!" Then shall we be among those, of whom (according to the prophet Isaiah, speaking by the Spirit of God) "it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him, and He will save us; this is the Lord, we have waited for Him: we will

¹ Matt. vii. 13.² John xiv. 6.³ John xv. 5.

be glad and rejoice in His salvation."¹ Then shall the multitude of His redeemed "not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them."² "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it."³

¹ Isa. xxv. 9.

² Isa. xlix. 10.

³ Isa. xxv. 8.





ELEVENTH DAY.

Parable of the Ten Virgins.

MATT. XXV. 1.

Mary. AND this is really to be our last day of parables, Mamma! I am so sorry for it, for I like reading them in this way very much.

Mrs. B. You will, I hope, my love, like reading them more and more, the oftener you read them, and the more you study them. When you read the Bible itself, you will find several more of these parables, containing

lessons which you may well reason upon and consider ; many which will not strike you at first sight, but in which you will find, at each fresh reading, more hidden truths, and more valuable instruction ; but I have selected now most of those which I think are best suited to our present purpose, and I hope our conversations upon them will not soon be forgotten.

Mary. Oh ! no, Mamma, I am sure they will not : and I am quite sure we shall both understand these parables very much better than we should have done, without talking about them in this way ; but only I am sorry that there are no more of them.

Mrs. B. Endeavour, my dear loves, to remember well, not only the parables which we have read, but the lessons which they are intended to convey ; and not only to remember, but, as far as you have opportunities, to practise those holy thoughts, and those Christian virtues which are taught in them. "Remember now thy Creator," says the wisest of men, "in the days of thy youth."¹

¹ Eccles. xii. 1.

And who, indeed, is there who knows whether he shall live to be old? Which of us knows whether God will grant us another year, another day, or even another hour of life?

Mary. Mamma, I hope it is not wrong to wish to live a long while; but I am so very happy, that I should be very sorry if I was to die soon.

Mrs. B. And may our merciful God and Father keep you here on earth for many happy and useful years! No, my love, assuredly it is not wrong, and at your age it is most natural, to enjoy, with a grateful heart, all the blessings of life; and to love, and be thankful for that state in which it has pleased Almighty wisdom that you should be placed: but as certainly it is right, and the bounden duty of every one of us, old or young, to endeavour to be prepared, whenever it shall please that same Almighty wisdom to call us to another state. You remember the prayer in the Evening Hymn:

“Teach me to live, that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed.”

And such should be the earnest prayer of

every Christian. We are indeed taught how to live, and our prayer ought rather to be, to give us grace to practise what we know: remembering always our Saviour's words, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."¹ But we have turned upon a subject which leads us exactly to the parable which I had intended to take for to-day's reading. If you please, I will begin it, and we will make our observations on it as we go on.

Mary. Thank you, Mamma; I had quite forgotten that we were come for the parables; but I shall like to hear it very much.

Mrs. B. We will begin then, at once, with the parable of the Ten Virgins.

"Then," says our Lord, speaking of the last day, "shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom."

Henry. What! is this another parable about a marriage?

Mrs. B. Yes; and the meaning of the

¹ John xiii. 17.

verse is perhaps not very clear without understanding something of the Jewish customs with regard to marriages. They are all celebrated at night; and the new-married couple go about in a sort of procession for some time, with all their relations and friends attending them, with drums and trumpets, and lights. When they return home, they find the whole house lighted up, and a feast prepared, and the servants and attendants, with torches or lamps, waiting to receive them. These ten virgins, therefore, who are spoken of, were some of those whose duty it was to remain in the house, and "go forth to meet the bridegroom," with their lamps, when he returned.

Henry. Thank you, Mamma; and now, if you will go on, I will not stop you again.

Mrs. B. "And five of them were wise, and five were foolish." Their wisdom or folly we shall see directly. "They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept. And at mid-

night there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out: but the wise answered, saying, Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves."

Henry. That may have been very wise, Mamma; but it seems to be very ill-natured and selfish.

Mrs. B. No, my love, not so: if they had had abundance for themselves, or more than was necessary, *then*, indeed, they ought to have given to their neighbours who were in want of it; and that, without considering whether they were in want by their own neglect or not; but it is the first duty of every one to attend to his own *necessities*; and to give away what we require to perform a part of our duty, in order to assist others, is an act, not of generosity, but of injustice as well as folly. The five wise virgins had provided oil for themselves, to perform that

which they were bound to do: and they could not give to the others without neglecting the orders which they had themselves received.

Henry. I suppose you are right, Mamma; but still it seemed very hard upon the others.

Mrs. B. But whose fault was it, that they had not oil, as well as the wise?

Henry. Oh! their own, Mamma.

Mrs. B. Well, then, whom had they to blame but themselves? The wise virgins, however, gave them the best advice; "We have none to spare; if we give to you we shall also be in fault: but lose no more time; go to them that sell, and buy for yourselves; perhaps you may yet be in time to be admitted to the feast." "But," continues the parable, "while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not."

Mary. What did he mean by saying, "I know you not?"

Mrs. B. It is not an uncommon form of expression in the Scriptures, meaning, as it does here, I disown you, I refuse to acknowledge you. In this instance it is as if the bridegroom had said, "You claim to be admitted, and pretend to be my followers and attendants; I know you not as such. I know of none such, but those who were here in attendance when I returned, who were fulfilling their duties, and who, having been ready, have long been admitted. The door is now shut, and I can no longer allow you to come in." And now can you apply this parable?

Mary. Yes, Mamma, I think I know what it means, after what we were talking about just before we began to read it.

Mrs. B. Well, my love, what does it mean?

Mary. It means, Mamma, I think, that we should be ready prepared whenever our Lord calls for us.

Mrs. B. And that if we are not so ready—?

Mary. That He will not admit us to Heaven.

Mrs. B. Very well, my love, you are quite right as to the object which the parable has in view; let us now consider it verse by verse. In the first place, I wish you to observe, that all the ten virgins, the wise and the foolish alike, lit their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. What do you think this means?

Mary. I do not know, Mamma; it surely does not mean that they all meant and tried to do their duty.

Mrs. B. Most assuredly not, my love: but we may take them to represent two very different sorts of persons; all of whom, however, are outwardly and in name Christians: all of whom alike have been called, and ordered to attend at the heavenly feast: all of whom profess their intention of attending at it: all of whom are instructed in their duties, and have "lit their lamps" by the sacred light of the word of God, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ; but who afterwards conduct themselves in very different ways: "for five of them were wise, and five were foolish."

Mary. Then, Mamma, if all this is meant,

what is the oil which the wise ones took with them, and the foolish did not?

Mrs. B. You know that if you light the wick of a lamp, and put no oil underneath it, the lamp will burn a very short time indeed, and then go out: and the lamps which were used by the Jews required to have the oil poured into them constantly, to keep them burning; in that respect they were a fitter representation than those which we now use, of the spiritual meaning of the parable. It is not enough, you see, to light the lamp, even though it be lit from the Word of God: though Religion be kindled in our hearts, yet if we carelessly neglect it, if we omit to feed it, it will die away like the lamp which had no oil. The oil then, that which must feed it, is the Word, and the Love, and the Spirit of God: constant and daily prayer for His grace, study of His will, and attention to His commands. Without this, the flame will soon go out; and when our Lord calls us, we shall wish in vain that we had not neglected this preparation. But to make it effectually, unceasing

watchfulness is necessary, lest we fall into temptation.

Mary. But, Mamma, even the wise virgins slumbered and slept, while they were waiting for the bridegroom; that was not very watchful, was it?

Mrs. B. And it is very possible, that this may be intended to teach us, that even the very best among us occasionally slumber, and are negligent over our duty; to show us how far we all come short of the perfect law of God; and at the same time to encourage us with the hope, that if we not only light our lamps, but make a provision of oil in our souls to feed them, God, for Christ's sake, will not severely visit our transgressions.

Henry. How frightened the foolish virgins must have been, when they found that their lamps were gone out, and that they had no time to get any more oil!

Mrs. B. And what do you think must be the feeling of the sinner, who, having all his life neglected that religion which was taught him as a child; having made no preparation to receive the great Bridegroom, when He

shall come to judge the world, is at length awoke from his slumber by the awful cry, "He cometh!" When he finds himself visited by disease, laid upon a bed from which he shall never rise, but from which, according to all probability, in a very few hours he shall be summoned to appear before his Judge, to account for his neglect of that precious light, which was given to him to keep burning?

Mary. How dreadful, Mamma! but I am sure I have heard of persons who had been very wicked, and who repented and were very good when they found that they were dying. Do you mean that they would be too late?

Mrs. B. God alone, my love, who knows all hearts, can know what are the real feelings of such persons, and He alone can judge how far such late repentance can be admitted before Him "who is set on the throne, who judgeth right;"¹ but at least the risk of such delay is awful. The Lord may come without even such short warning;

¹ Psalm ix. 4.

the sinner may be cut off in a moment, before he has even time to reflect upon his conduct. God forbid, my dear children, but that you and I, whenever we are called, may be ready to appear with a sure trust in the merits of our Saviour Christ, and with humble consciousness that we have endeavoured to keep His light burning in our hearts. But he who feels that he has too long neglected the care of his soul, and has suffered the light of his religion to grow dull and dim, he should hasten, before it be too late, to redeem the time : and knowing that none of his fellow-creatures have enough for them and him, that none of them can aid him, he should "go to them that sell, and buy for himself."

Mary. To those that sell, Mamma ! How do you mean ? If the oil means what you said it did, there is no one that can sell it.

Mrs. B. There is, indeed, but One from whom it can be obtained—and that One by His Holy Prophet, by the most splendid of all His prophets, whose writings you will read and admire in the Holy Scriptures ; by

the mouth of Isaiah, that One has called to all His people, saying, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."¹ The only price that God demands, is a humble and a contrite heart: when such a one is offered to Him, He will give His Holy Spirit, He will light again the dying lamp, and make it burn brightly to the last. But if we neglect to apply to Him, if we put off from day to day, He may at length come as He says He will, "as a thief in the night,"² we know not when, nor how soon; and if our sorrow and alarm be too late, we have only to look to the parable before us, to see what will be our fate. While we are in this world, while we are still in the land of mercy; we are told to "ask, and we shall have; to knock, and it shall be opened unto us:"³ but when the bridegroom has shut to the door, then this gracious permission ceases: then to them that knock, saying, "Lord, Lord, open

¹ Isa. lv. 1.² 1 Thess. v. 2.³ Matt. vii. 7

to us," the fearful answer shall be, "I know you not." "When once," says Jesus in another Gospel, "the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; He shall answer and say unto you, I know ye not whence ye are: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity."¹

Mary. Mamma, I do not quite know what is meant by the time of the bridegroom coming. Does it mean the day of judgment, or does it mean the day of our death?

Mrs. B. They are to us, my dear girl, one and the same thing: "for whatever may be the season appointed in the secret counsels of God for that great and terrible day, when the heavens and the earth shall flee from the face of Him who shall be seated on the throne, and their place shall no more be found; the end of the world, with respect to each individual, takes place at the conclusion of his own life. In the

¹ Luke xiii. 25.

grave there will be no repentance, no virtues can be acquired, no evil habits thrown off. With that character of virtue or of vice with which a man leaves the world, with that he must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. In that moment, therefore, in which his present life ends, every man's future condition becomes irreversibly determined. In this sense, to every one of us on earth "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh, the Judge standeth before the door: let us watch, therefore, and pray; watch over ourselves, and pray for the succours of God's grace, that we may be able to stand before the Son of Man. Nor shall vigilance and prayer be ineffectual. On the incorrigible and perverse, on those who mock at God's threatenings, and reject His promises, on these only the severity of His wrath will fall. But for those who lay His warnings seriously to heart, who dread the pollutions of the world, and flee from sin as from a serpent; who fear God's displeasure more than death, and

seek His favour more than life, though much of frailty will to the last adhere to them, yet these are the objects of the Father's mercy, of the Redeemer's love. For these He died, for these He pleads, these He supports and strengthens with His Spirit, these He shall lead with Him triumphant to the mansions of glory, where sin and death "¹ shall be no more, and when " God shall be in all." "²

Mary. Then, Mamma, what a terrible thing it must be to die suddenly! And yet one hears of it every day.

Mrs. B. Sudden death, my love, is an awful idea to any one, even to the best among us: it is fearful to be called at once into the presence of God, our Maker and Judge; and fearful, indeed, for those who have lived, and are living, in a regular course of violating His laws, and neglecting His commandments! And, as we know not whether it may not be our fate to be thus called, how anxiously should we follow the

¹ Bishop Horsley. Notes to Mant's Bible. Matt xxiv. 42.

² 1 Cor. xv. 28.

command with which our Saviour Christ concludes this very parable, which we have now been reading; "Watch, therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh:" and in another place he adds, "Watch and *pray*, lest ye enter into temptation."¹ Here is our true safety; hence we may obtain the daily supply of heavenly oil to keep our lamps burning, till we are called to our everlasting inheritance with the saints in light.

Mary. Mamma, I hope that we shall always try to be ready whenever God is pleased to call us; but I do hope we may all live a long time yet.

Mrs. B. And yet, dear child, how short, in comparison with eternal duration, is the longest life of man! How little does it signify whether we live here twenty, or fifty, or a hundred years, if at the end of our life we are prepared for that better life which is to come! If we feel assured, through the mercy of God, that though by our death we part for a while with those whom we most

¹ Matt. xxvi. 41.

love on earth, we shall yet meet them again in an eternity of happiness inconceivable in heaven! May that gracious and merciful God so direct and sanctify here all that we do, and say, and think; may He so bless our conversations here, and these our endeavours to learn and to explain His Holy Word; that be our life longer or shorter, it may be passed in constant watchfulness over our own hearts, and constant submission to His most holy will! So, when He shall call upon each of us, when we shall hear the awful warning, "Behold, I come quickly," He may give us boldness to answer, with the holy Apostle St. John, "Amen! Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"¹

¹ Rev. xxii. 20.

THE END.





